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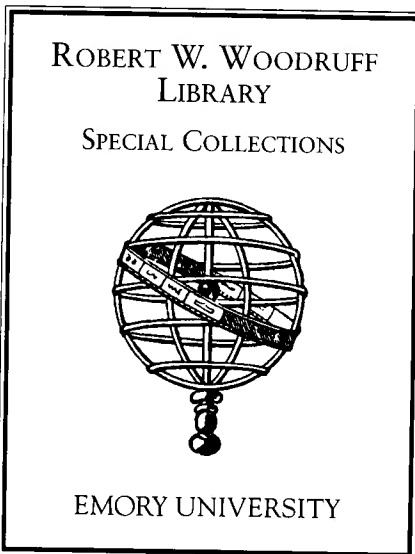
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## THE IDOL OF MODERN PARIS.



### PART I.

#### I.

"So it's settled, Savinien, my boy, you're going home to bed?"

"Why yes, my dear George. We are the only fellows left on the boulevard. It is four in the morning, and I'm used up. Remember that I spent last night in a railway train, and, thanks to you, I have been making a wild night of this one.

"You're not used to it, but you will be by-and-by."

"I shan't aim at that. My uncle didn't send me to Paris to conduct myself in this manner."

"Your uncle is a hundred years behind the times. Such is the natural consequence of a lifetime of summers spent in a château at Dôl and of winters passed at Saint Malo. Your old fogey of a relative had a brilliant idea when he thought of giving you a six-months' holiday to get the stiffness out of your joints. This happy thought of his affords me the felicity of showing you the lions. How did it come into his head?"

"He is far from being as much behind the times as you imagine, for he thinks that a man should see something of life before settling down and marrying. He says that ships were made to sail and men to travel. He was a sailor once, you know."

"Yes, thirty years ago, when he was young; but now he is one no longer, and he plants his cabbages like any other good gentleman-farmer. If a similar inviting future awaits you I foresee how it will all end. In six months' time you will return to the manor of Plouër with a few thousand francs of debts behind you; your uncle will pay them—after your repentance in sackcloth and ashes—and in the spring you will marry your cousin Yvonne. You will have a large family, and will end your days between two sporting dogs, who are unchained every morning to run down a solitary hare, and two broken-down mares which you will hitch to your crazy coach to drive off and visit all the yokels in the neighbourhood."

"Well, I should not be an object of pity, as Yvonne is charming."

"Is she as pretty as Anita?"

"The girl who took supper with us? Oh, my cousin does not resemble her in the least, thank goodness!"

"Good! You are in love with her, or think you are. You'll get over it, for I hope that you'll make the best of your time in the 'modern Babylon.' I'll bet that at Plouer Paris is always qualified as 'the Great Babylon.'"

"The peasants are not so bad as that; they say, 'the capital.'"

"It comes to the same thing. Those people are mere fossils, and it is utterly impossible that you, Savinien d'Amaulis, should resign yourself to being buried alive with them in the very 'flower of your youth.' When a man has a fine-sounding name like D'Amaulis, just fit for the hero of a novel, and is a viscount to boot—which you are, if I am not mistaken—"

"And you are not," interrupted Savinien, laughing. "The Amaulis have been titled and hard up for at least four centuries back. Now, a penniless viscount doesn't amount to much nowadays."

"So poor as that! Why, I thought that your father left you an estate."

"Yes, and it brings me in six thousand six hundred francs a year without counting the stock; twenty brace of fowls, and I don't know how many pots of salt butter."

"I hadn't as much as that when I came here, and yet I continue to live, and live well."

"Oh, you know how to make money."

"And why shouldn't you learn how?"

"Because I have never been taught."

"I'll teach you, if you like. When we both finished studying law in '75 at the Rennes faculty, I didn't imagine that I should soon play a part in a city where millions are lying idle. My mother pinched herself to allow me fifty crowns a month, and what she left when she died did not enrich me. All the same, I have a foothold in Paris. Doesn't my life here seem to you a pleasant one? This evening at six, you fell like a bomb into my apartments in the Rue d'Antin. You threw yourself into my arms by way of proving that you hadn't forgotten your school-fellow, George Fougeray, here present, and I was delighted to find that you remembered me. At seven I took you to the Café Anglais. Was the dinner good?"

"Excellent. The cooking seemed to me delicious, and the wines exceptionally fine. Uncle Trémorin, who knows all about wines, would have said the same."

"Your uncle never drank such wine as that, I'm sure. After dinner I took you to the Variétés Theatre, and, as it was a first performance, our seats cost five louis, being stalls. I had two and gave you one."

"Which I shouldn't have accepted had I known what it cost you."

"That isn't the question. Did you enjoy yourself?"

"Immensely. The play was amusing, the actresses pretty—"

"Not all of them. But those who supped with us were very stylish. They are among the prominent ones."

"That was easy to see. They blazed with diamonds."

"And they were neither prosy nor affected, which is still more often the case. Anita is extremely taking."

"She made me laugh till I cried."

"And she wishes to show you her house in the Rue de Madrid. We will go there to-morrow, and you shall see in what style she lives. Now, what do you think of the men to whom I introduced you? A stockbroker's partner, an *attaché* of a foreign embassy, a Russian nobleman, an editor—"

"That one was witty."

"If the others were not, you will at least admit that their manners were good."

"I was delighted to make their acquaintance."

"It only depends upon yourself to become intimate with them, as they liked you very much. But let me resume my summing up of the pleasures of our evening. After supper we played cards——"

"And in three quarters of an hour you had won three hundred louis——just my yearly income."

"And you, who played with praiseworthy timidity, won a thousand francs."

"Very nearly. I am still amazed at it. Such a thing never happened to me before. At home when we play whist we only stake halfpenny points each. My cousin Yvonne's present must have brought me good luck."

"What present? That little golden pig hanging from your watch-chain? Did Mademoiselle de Trémorin give you that? That Breton Agnes must know what a fetish is, then?"

"No. The gold pig was given me by my aunt, who saw in the papers that such ornaments were in fashion. Yvonne's gift is a medal of the Virgin, one that was blessed at Jerusalem. When I left home, I promised to wear it always."

"Upon your heart? This is touching, indeed! I return to my summing up and its result. You saw what an evening we had of it?"

"Delicious! I never enjoyed anything so much."

"Well, my dear fellow, I have the same pleasure every evening, and so may you if you choose."

"The deuce I may! I ask no better, but my uncle manages my affairs, and has merely opened me a credit of six thousand francs, which must last for the term of my stay here. Now, at the rate at which you live, I couldn't hold out six weeks, much less six months."

"When you require any money I will lend it to you."

"Thanks. I prefer not to run into debt."

"You are right. Your uncle might scold you," replied George Fougerey, in an ironical tone. "Well, I will teach you the art of making a hundred thousand francs a year with bright ideas, such ideas as often come to me."

"I am sure that they will never enter *my* head."

"You will see that they will come to you. They are in the Paris air. When you are acclimated you will catch them flying. Meantime, we'll breakfast together to-morrow."

"But my morning is taken up. I must first go to my uncle's banker, to whom I have a letter of introduction, and after that I have to call on three relations of ours in the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

"Good! Still you can come for an hour to Tortoni's. I shall be there at noon. But here is your street, and you must be half dead with sleep, for at Plouër you go to bed with the chickens, I presume. There! go to bed, my dear boy, and pleasant dreams to you!"

This conversation, begun in the Avenue de l'Opéra, had brought the two friends to the corner of the Rue du Helder, and Savinien d'Amaulius was but fifty paces from the hotel where he had put up on arriving in Paris. He could scarcely keep awake from weariness, but still he had no desire to sleep, for all that had been said to him was whirling through his brain, and he longed to be alone to think it over.



A young man of twenty-four, who has never left his own province, cannot suddenly enter the whirlpool of Parisian life without being over-excited by the change. Savinien had always lived with his uncle Trémorin—an uncle on his mother's side—who had been a careful guardian to him. Three years' residence at Rennes as a law student; three years, during which he had frequently run back to the old château at Plouër; two journeys to Paris with the above-mentioned uncle, who had gone there to see the races, made up the amount of variety that had previously occurred in the life of the Viscount d'Amaulis, who had, however, turned this little to good account. His student's life had expanded his mind; short as had been his two trips to Paris, they had opened a new world and a vast horizon to him, which Brittany had given no hint of, and he was glad once more to find himself in the capital, free, and well provided with means to enjoy his liberty.

He warmly pressed George Fougeray's extended hand, and left him to enter the hotel. Ten minutes later, carrying the candle, which a waiter whom he had abruptly aroused had given him, he entered the apartments which he had engaged the evening before, two communicating rooms looking into a courtyard, and situated on the third floor.

These rooms were not so convenient as the vast chamber which he had occupied at Plouër, but they were more comfortably furnished, for the owner of the château did not believe in modern furniture. A good Voltaire arm-chair opened its arms to Savinien, and he had only to light the wood which a careful attendant had set ready in the chimney-place.

This he did, for it was April and the nights were cold. He slipped on a dressing-gown, made as they make them in Brittany; he thrust his feet into slippers, which a Paris dandy would have pitched out of the window, although the snowy hands of cousin Yvonne had wrought them, for they were in worsted-work; he lighted a cigar, and gave himself up to a pleasant reverie before the fire.

Suddenly, however, a strange noise startled him. This noise, which Savinien would not have remarked in the daytime, was very distinct in the profound silence of the night. As previously mentioned, the apartment looked out upon the courtyard of the hotel, and the distant rumbling of late vehicles passing over the boulevard did not reach it. But in Paris walls are thin, and, moreover, when any one walks overhead, the occupant of the room below catches the sound of every footstep.

Now some one was walking on the fourth floor directly over Savinien d'Amaulis' head. The footsteps were hasty, and those of a man wearing heavy big-heeled boots.

This, in truth, was nothing out of the way. The traveller in this room had as much right as the third-floor tenant to come home at four in the morning, and to walk about his room before going to bed, instead of peaceably warming himself before the fire.

But he did not content himself with going and coming. He often interrupted this exercise; and every time he stopped, one heard a kind of dull knocking, which sounded as though from a hammer. The individual in question seemed to be nailing up something—a chest, it might be; for the tool he was using did not shake the ceiling, in fact, the blows he dealt were deadened by some intermediate object.

The time was strangely chosen for such work as this. Strangers dropping in at a hotel are not usually in the habit of attending to such matters for themselves. "That gentleman seems to think that nothing is well done

but what he does himself," thought George Fougeray's friend. "He must certainly be going off by an early train; he wants to be ready at the very minute. Perhaps he thinks that it is hardly worth his while to get a porter to fasten his boxes. I should not do what he does, though my uncle has always preached to me about economy. But trunks usually have locks or snaps. In what sort of a box can this eccentric individual have placed his luggage?"

Meanwhile the knocks continued, with regular intervals between them. It was easy to count the nails that were being driven in.

The intermittent sound awoke a gloomy remembrance in the mind of Savinien d'Amaulix. There is the memory of the eye, but there is also that of the ear, not to mention that of the heart. Now the poor fellow remembered how, one day, in the old house where he had lived at Saint-Malo, he had heard just such a knocking above his head. His father had died, and the coffin was being closed.

Savinien was twelve years old at the time. He had lost his mother almost at his birth, and when he escorted his father's remains to the grave, no one remained to him in all the world but the younger brother of his mother, whom he had scarcely known. The sad day which had made him an orphan was a well-remembered date in his life, and it is not surprising that he had never forgotten it. But how had the night-sounds to which he listened suggested to him a resemblance to the most painful period of his child-life? The idea was perhaps due to over-excited nerves, and he did not long attempt to seek for the cause of the perturbation which he experienced.

The noise continued for a few moments longer, but ceased at last, and the busy traveller, who preferred using his own hands to paying a workman, also abandoned his walking up and down. Having apparently nothing more to nail up, he had thrown himself upon his bed to rest till it was time to start, and Savinien ceased to think of him.

His thoughts returned to the varied things which had filled his mind on his first evening in Paris. He once more saw the auditorium of the Variétés Theatre blazing with light, the diamonds sparkling on snowy shoulders, the actresses showing off their airs and graces upon the stage. The joyous strains of the operetta sounded in his ears, and it seemed to him that he still heard his friend George Fougeray, the man about town, telling him the names of the celebrated persons of both sexes who were to be met at all first performances—academicians and "swells," members of the highest aristocracy and notorious irregulars. All these sparkling faces passed before Savinien's eyes, though they were half closed, and he thought that the strangers smiled, as if to say, "You are one of us."

Then had come the supper at the café; the thousand lights of the candles reflected in the crystal on the snowy cloth; the table laden with flowers; the costly wines lying in baskets or standing in silver ice pails. And the chatting of the men—mocking, ironical, and sneering, full of rapid transition and fashionable jargon. These fellows knew everything, talked of everything, and despised everything.

Meanwhile the women chatted in the bold language of the green-room, summing up, in some dry sentence as rapid as ciphering, the value of their lovers, serious or otherwise; "chaffing" aristocratic ladies, and accusing them of copying their dresses and manners. Then there was the card-playing, the sharp click of the gold, the rustling of the bank notes carelessly crumpled up, the unexpected throws which filled or emptied in a second

hands full of louis, with cries of surprise, joy, or anger, noise, passion, and fever. Savinien d'Amaulis had "lived" more in the three hours he had spent in a fashionable restaurant than in the three last years he had passed in the feudal halls of the manor of Plouër.

The face of George Fougeray stood out in bold relief on the picture called up by the imagination of the penniless viscount ; George Fougeray, whom he had known as a poor student at Rennes, and whom he found transformed into an opulent high-liver, appreciated, sought after, the master of his present and sure of his future, satisfied with himself, and indeed overflowing with self confidence.

Savinien repeated to himself his last words of advice : " Do as I do." Thus had spoken this fortunate individual. " Dare, and Paris is yours." And Savinien longed to dare.

He was, none the less, the last of a race of noblemen who for four hundred years had transmitted from father to son the holy virtues of proud poverty. He had been taught in his childhood that honour is everything in life, and that one must live honestly to die happily. Brought up by the rector of his parish, under the eyes of his uncle Trémorin, who was a man of firm, old-fashioned morality, he had never learned to worship money, and the echoes of Parisian bacchanalia had never disturbed his robust youthful liberty. The only newspapers taken in at Plouër were those devout Legitimist prints the *Gazette de France* and the *Union*, neither of which he read, and indeed till he was sixteen years old he had thought of no other pleasure save riding and hunting.

Later on, while he was studying law at Rennes, he had perceived that his comrades amused themselves in a less rustic style, but he had never been tempted to imitate them. There is hard drinking in the old capital of the duchy of Brittany, and young men there are not very fastidious as to the companions they choose among the other sex. Now, debauchery was not to the taste of Savinien, and he did not admire barmaids. The fair ladies whom he met on the beach of fashionable Dinard pleased him far more, but they intimidated him, although more than one had encouraged him to plunge into the cosmopolitan set which frequents watering-places and summer resorts, that class of society which, when the season is over, disappears, as Alfred de Musset says, " without touching earth with its feet."

The youthful Viscount d'Amaulis seemed to have been born expressly to succeed in such society. Instead of being short, squat, and somewhat heavy, like so many Bretons, he was tall and slight ; his features, instead of seeming to be *hacked out*, had a delicacy which would have sufficed to distinguish him among a thousand fellow Bretons, even had he worn, like the peasants about him, a goatskin and a broad-brimmed soft felt hat.

He probably inherited his personal advantages from his mother, a Parisian of good family, whom his father had married without a portion ; she had endowed him also with a frank, gay spirit, an easy, somewhat weak disposition, a decided taste for art, luxury, and elegance ; all of which is wanting to the descendants of the Druids. Like them, however, he was brave, sincere, full of feeling, and ever inspired by duty. His uncle had great trouble to prevent him, when but thirteen years old, from following the Ille-et-Vilaine soldiers when they started to defend Paris against the Germans.

From all these contrasting traits it had resulted that Savinien had

accepted without any great regret the prospect of a country gentleman's life, although he often aspired to a less monotonous and more exciting existence.

It must be said that he had not finally accepted this provincial career until he had discovered that his cousin Yvonne was charming. He was six years older than she, and she had always seemed a mere child to him. But one fine day, when she reached sixteen, she had expanded like a heather-bell, and Savinien had fallen unwittingly in love. At a later day he knew that Yvonne adored him. M. de Trémorin approved of their love, which would end in marriage, and Savinien had speedily become accustomed to the idea of marrying his cousin as soon as he should reach his majority. But a year was lacking, and this last twelvemonth Savinien would willingly have spent at the château with his betrothed.

But his uncle, towards the end of the winter, had advised him to stay in Paris during the six months of celibacy which yet remained to him. This advice resembled an order. M. de Trémorin had, in a rambling way, explained why he wished his future son-in-law to remain six months away; he had given various paltry reasons; but Savinien, who understood him, knew what to think. It was a test. Uncle Trémorin had very stubborn ideas on all subjects. He thought that a young man, who had always been at home, and who had seen nothing, or, but little of life, was a fair prey so long as his wild oats remained unsown; that the passions which sleep unknown must sooner or later break forth, and that it was better this should occur before than after marriage.

"I had made ten sea-voyages when I left the service to marry your aunt," said he to Savinien; "and once married, I never again wished to leave Plouër. Six months on the boulevards are worth three voyages round the world. So go to Paris, and if you return in the autumn without shipwreck, you shall marry your cousin before Christmas."

Yvonne wept bitterly, but as her father remained firm Savinien started off, vowing that his thoughts would always be with her, and that he would write to her every day. Within twenty-four hours after arriving he had already broken his vow, for he had failed to write, and it was not of his cousin that he was thinking, as he sat dreaming before the fire in the hotel room. Daylight was beginning to dawn, and yet the Parisian puppets still danced before his eyes, which were closing sleepily.

Savinien thought of shaking off the torpor which held him to his arm-chair, and of setting himself bravely down to write the letter looked for in Brittany with so much impatience. Then he thought how long the day was likely to be, and that before the last post he should certainly find time to fulfil the promise he had broken the day before. So he stayed before the fire.

He had a further excuse for putting off the accomplishment of his duty till another time—that he was not in a fit state to pen anything. It would be better to write after resting than to scrawl a few commonplace words upon paper. Yvonne knew how to read "between the lines," and would certainly have found out that her dear cousin had changed. His brain was full of images too Parisian in character, and his style of writing would have shown the agitation that remained to him after cards and supper. In order to recover his clearness of mind, and to be sure of returning to the true provincial strain, he needed first to make a few serious visits, as he intended doing in the morning.

Moreover, there was but one postal delivery at Plouër every day. The

rural postman arrived at noon, and when her betrothed was absent Yvonne always went to meet him at the end of the avenue near the château. Savinien pictured her figure flitting under the tall oaks, his letter in her hand, that letter which must always be addressed to uncle Trémorin, and which she dared not unseal without her father's permission, though she always longed to do so. "She will be very much pleased to-morrow," he muttered, as his eyes closed. "I will send her four long pages after breakfast."

This praiseworthy resolution quieted his mind, and he thought only of rest. It would have been wise to have gone to bed, and indeed he thought of so doing, but day had now dawned, and the clock on the mantel-piece struck five.

Savinien said to himself that if he went to bed he would run a great risk of sleeping till noon, too late an hour to present himself at the banker's on whom his uncle wished him to call, and so he decided to sleep sitting until it was time to take a bath and rid himself of the drowsiness of so disturbed a night.

Vehicles were already rumbling along the street, the servants of the hotel were setting about their duties, and the porter had opened the courtyard gates. All these sounds reached Savinien, who was scarcely yet half asleep, and kept him from anything like real slumber. He even heard a vehicle stop, a waiter cross the courtyard, mount the stairs, and knock at the door of the room on the floor overhead.

The person whom he called could not have undressed, for his big-heeled boots immediately resounded on the floor of his apartment. He opened his door and entered into conversation with the man who had come to take his boxes. Then there was coming and going for ten minutes or so, and the staircase creaked under the footsteps of a heavily laden porter.

"That must be the chest which that fellow was nailing up last night," thought poor Savinien, whom the noise still disturbed. "If he had stayed here I should have left to-day for fear of having my head split by his abominable hammering. What the deuce can the fellow have put into his chest that it nearly breaks the back of a porter used to carrying trunks?"

And, as he was almost awake, and had no hope of falling asleep until the noise ceased, he rose and looked through the window facing the courtyard, and had the satisfaction of seeing a stout servant carrying an enormous black wooden chest—a chest as long as it was broad, with iron handles on each side, and a strip of card, upon which, no doubt, figured the address to which the box was to be sent.

The traveller who was going away followed the waiter, step by step, and appeared to watch carefully over his chest, which must have contained objects of great value, since he did not lose sight of it for a moment. The individual in question wore an otter cap, together with a long furred overcoat. His boots also were edged with fur. He looked as though he were about to start for the North Pole.

Savinien, who saw him from behind observed that he was tall, and so strongly built that he might have carried his own chest; however, the young fellow did not catch sight of the countenance of this singular personage.

"He has the figure and dress of the Russian giant who was exhibited last year at the fair at Rennes," the young Breton said to himself, rubbing his eyes. "I shall, for curiosity's sake, inquire what is the nationality of

distance, and its rumblings, sounding afar off, reminded Savinien of the tramping in the hall which he had heard before he had fallen asleep.

The dream was becoming tragical, but Savinien asked himself whether it was indeed a dream, or if some one was mounting the stairs in great haste ? The young fellow was indeed in that strange state which is neither sleep nor wakefulness—that mixed condition in which the mind conjures up phantoms while the body still experiences real sensations.

This uncertainty is never of long duration ; after a few moments' hesitation the sleeper either enters into full possession of his physical faculties, or else his spirit passes entirely into the land of dreams. This time the soul won the mastery.

Yvonne's cousin again began to see the vision which a passing sound had interrupted. He heard nothing more, but imagined strange things. The idol was still there, monstrous and motionless. Its vile worshippers still frolicked around its pedestal.

Frightful flashes of lightning darted through the clouds, illuminating the scene with a sinister glare ; blueish flames crept up from the cleft soil ; gigantic shadows crossed the horizon, which was as red as blood.

The scene presented to his mind's eye seemed like some picture by Martin, the English painter, who has depicted the "Last Judgment," and "Belshazzar's Feast."

Then a huge face seemed to peer forth from amid the darkness, the face of Moses holding the tablets of the law. It was, indeed, the divine legislator of the Hebrews, such as Michael Angelo has sculptured him at St. Peter's in Rome. It was Moses in threatening and terrible anger. His eyes blazed, his face seemed all aflame. He slowly descended the steep mountain side which he had ascended in obedience to Jehovah, and at each step he took towards his rebellious people he seemed to swell in size.

And, strange to relate, with his long beard, his bristling hair, his severe features, he looked like uncle Trémorin, even as the virgin who had remained faithful to the worship of the true God had had the same sweet face as Yvonne. Savinien was persecuted in his dream by resemblances.

Suddenly, Moses raised his hands and dashed upon the rock the tablets of the law, which broke with a loud crash, and the sleeper thereupon leaped from his bed as though a loud blow had resounded upon the door of one of the rooms near by. At the same moment a frightful clap of thunder shook the filthy idol upon its eminence, and Moses raised his right hand to curse the impious crowd. The statue, struck by the fire of Heaven, fell upon the frightened dancers and crushed them beneath it. A voice from on high cried : "Thus shall perish all those who deny the Eternal and adore gold alone !" And then the prophetic vision vanished into darkness ploughed by fire.

Savinien awoke completely ; he was frightened, agitated, and began to feel his limbs, in order to make sure that he was not still asleep. Never had he dreamed the like in all his life ; he admitted to himself that he had felt afraid ; and he was ashamed of this.

"I have seen the beast of the Apocalypse," muttered he, rubbing his eyes ; "down at Plouër I only saw hares and little kids skipping before my setters. That dry champagne must be very heady to have played me such a trick as to make me over-lucid in my sleep. It is true that I drank a good deal of it at supper. Besides, this is the consequence of having handled money for hours together. The Golden Calf appears to me, and when I say *calf*, I draw it mild. It was really a golden *pig*, which

seemed to be copied from the trinket which my aunt presented to me. A golden pig? Ha! ha! my companions of last night indeed seemed to be given up to the worship of this beast, and they may end like those Hebrews. The future of France does not disquiet them, and all the warnings of Heaven would not keep them from similar gatherings. These people are given up to the fiend, and I am not and will not be. I shan't wear my watch charm any more, and to chase away bad dreams I will each night kiss that little medal which my cousin gave me. Poor Yvonne! how I shall amuse her by relating my vision!—but I shall say nothing of it to George; he would only laugh at me."

Then, after stretching himself for a moment, Savinien resumed his train of thought. "What time can it be? What! nine by this clock? Then, I have only just time enough to dress and take a bath before going to hand my letter-of-credit to Monsieur Montaurou. I might as well not go to-day as I won a thousand francs last night, but my uncle urged me so much not to lose any time about it."

These reflections were interrupted by a noise in the passage beyond the adjoining sitting-room. A sharp voice, that of a chambermaid belonging to the hotel, or at least so it seemed, cried out loudly:

"I tell you, madame, that it is no use knocking. There's nobody in No. 26. The traveller who had that room left this morning."

It was evident that this remark was addressed to some one on the upper floor, where the man with the chest had lodged. There came an answer which Savinien did not hear, and then the servant resumed: "If you don't believe me, madame, you can inquire at the office. They will tell you there that the gentleman took the early train." "At what station?" "Oh, I don't know, but the waiter who took charge of the luggage knows, most likely, and if you like to ask him, madame, you will find him in the porter's room."

The visitor was probably satisfied with this incomplete information, for the talking ceased. She was perhaps going away.

"It is written that I shall be disturbed every moment either by that good-for-nothing man or his acquaintances," muttered Savinien, who, what with want of sleep and want of quiet, was not in the best of humours. "What a strange chap he must be! He nails up his chests himself and starts off without letting his friends know. Poor woman! She probably arose with the lark to see her adored one, and finds the door shut when she comes. That fur-clad fellow is a perfect cub. But," thought Savinien, philosophising, "a woman who comes calling at hotels cannot amount to much. She must be like the damsels at last night's supper, or worse perhaps. I suspect her of dancing before the Golden Calf, or the animal which, in these degenerate times, has taken its place. Well! up I must get and dress in the twinkling of an eye."

With this sage resolution Savinien stretched himself again, yawned, and jumped out of bed.

He raised the curtain of the only window by which the light entered his chamber, and the sun of a bright April day shone in upon the commonplace furniture, such as is to be found in all hotels, even the most stylish. There was a velvet mantel-hanging and an English wash-basin, but not an object was for his own personal use, or associated with any recollection of the past.

The walls of the large room which he occupied at the château of Plouër were panelled with spruce, and decorated with guns, foils, and a number

this singular fellow, and what is his name. The landlord will tell me. But off he goes, and the best thing I can do now is to try to sleep. I hope that the lodgers and servants will leave me in peace, and so that their tramping up and down may not rouse me I will slip into my bedroom, which is further from the staircase than this little parlour, and stretch myself on the bed without undressing."

He acted in accordance with his words, and this time, with the help of a horizontal position, he did not fail to sleep soundly, though not without recollections of the game of cards and the gold raining down upon the green cloth of the table. This merry music soothed him to dreamy slumber.

Gamblers have dreams as well as heroes of tragedy, and these naturally relate to the life they lead. It is the same with all kinds of people. Racine tells us that Athalia saw Jezebel her mother: "As on her day of death most gorgeously arrayed."

Now, gamblers always dream of piles of gold, but Savinien d'Amaulis' visions were of a more complicated kind. He dreamed, to begin with, that he was a child, seated at his aunt Trémorin's feet, and that she held a Royaumont edition of the Bible upon her knees, a huge folio, in which she had long ago taught him to read. This Bible was illustrated on every page, and where she held it open one perceived a large picture of the Hebrews worshipping the Golden Calf. Presently the idolaters seemed to expand and become alive. In the distance a rocky mountain, dark and steep, appeared. At the foot of this Mount Sinai, under a fiery sky, there was a crowd of people, a motley group of men and women, dancing round an image displayed upon a lofty pedestal, while from above the burning sun of Arabia poured down its rays, making the idol glitter in the most dazzling manner.

Savinien recognised, one after another, the frenzied beings who led this weird and frantic dance. The men resembled the players who had taken part in that game at which he had won a thousand francs; the women were like the actresses who had supped at the restaurant where the wines had almost intoxicated the viscount.

It seemed to him, however, that the Golden Calf which overtopped the dancers was gradually undergoing a change; its muzzle lengthened, its horns became pointed ears and its tail began to twist in corkscrew fashion. The idol used by the Israelites indeed took the shape of a pig, that of the little golden pig which the last of the Amaulis wore on his watch-chain. And all the high-livers and fast women prostrated themselves before this image, which was typical of the only gods they worshipped, gold and luck.

Far away from the frenzied bacchanalian festival, quite in the background of the picture, a young girl knelt with clasped hands and her eyes raised to Heaven. At first Savinien could scarcely discern her form, lost in grey clouds. It was but a vague shadow, indistinct and wavering. But gradually the outlines became clearer, the features of the face more distinct. This maiden, praying to the true God for the enlightenment of the idolaters, was Yvonne.

Savinien uttered a cry and stretched out his arms to her, but only succeeded in striking the partition near his bed. Then his dream underwent a change.

The sweet face of his cousin had already vanished, but the slaves of gold were still dancing. The sun was clouded, however; great black masses of vapour came down the mountain side; thunder rolled in the



of family portraits, painted by unassuming artists, but sufficiently good to make them agreeable objects of contemplation. Yvonne's hung at the foot of the bed, and smiled upon him whenever he awoke. The windows looked out upon a heath which stretched afar, and where at this season the brooms were always in full growth.

"Whatever George may say," sighed the exile, "Brittany has its merits. I went to bed earlier, but I never had the headache when I woke up, whereas this morning my head seems to weigh a hundred pounds. I will have no more late suppers."

Just as he gave way to these longings and regrets as regarded home, he heard the door of his sitting-room shake, the key move, and the bolt slip to. "Well, this is a little too much!" thought he. "My room is entered without my leave and some one is using it as a refuge." Had a worshipper of the Golden Pig come in to perform his or her devotions? If so, the choice would prove a bad one.

Savinien, before going into his bedroom some hours before, had taken the precaution to close the door between the two apartments, so that he could not now see who had so unceremoniously entered his sitting-room, the key to the door of which he had thoughtlessly left in the lock outside.

This way of taking possession was certainly strange. A servant might possibly have entered without knocking, but would not have presumed to push the bolt so as to close the door inside. Still less would a friend. Besides, Savinien knew no one in Paris excepting George Fougeray, who at this early hour was doubtless fast asleep.

"Can it be a robber?" muttered Yvonne's unsophisticated cousin.

Like all newly-arrived country people he believed in the tales told in Brittany of robbers who readily slip into strangers' rooms at Paris hotels when the lodgers are careless enough to leave their keys in the doors. However, Savinien was not cowardly, although credulous, and he now made ready to receive with energetic measures the scoundrel who had entered without his leave and shut himself up so as not to be disturbed while he rifled trunks and made off with clothing, jewellery, and money.

In the first place, however, there was nothing to take, unless it were the clock or candlesticks belonging to the establishment, or the hat, cloak, overcoat, and boots which Savinien had thrown about before sitting down to warm himself. All the viscount's other belongings happened to be in the bedroom. As it did not seem likely that the robber would content himself with such meagre spoil as could be pounced upon in the parlour, he would probably come and examine the bedroom, where he might suppose he would find some drawers containing objects of value.

"I will wait for him and give him a warm reception," said Viscount d'Amaulis to himself, and as he spoke he took up a pretty thorn stick which he had cut in the Plouër woods.

Then, striking an attitude, he listened. However, he heard nothing. The robber was not a noisy one. He could not be in any great haste to commence plundering, for he neither appeared nor touched anything. He had not displaced nor stirred any of the furniture, nor did the floor creak under his footsteps.

The scamp was evidently keeping quite still in the centre of the little sitting-room which he had invaded, unless, indeed, he had hidden in a corner.

"This is a singular proceeding," thought Savinien, "one would swear that this person, whoever he may be, has only come here to hide. Per-

haps he is being looked for. The key was in the door outside. That was tempting. He only had to take it out to find himself in safety, feeling quite sure that no one would break down the door. The deuce! I don't wish to give shelter to a malefactor whom the police may be after? If this be one I won't give him up, but I will make him take himself off in a jiffy. At all events I'll find out at once what is the matter, and as he does not come to me, I'll go to him."

With these words, Savinien put his hand upon the knob of the door by which the two rooms communicated, and he was about to open it, when a noise was heard in the passage beyond, some hasty steps, and loud voices speaking words which it was easy to distinguish.

"You are mistaken, sir," said one of these voices—a female one; "the lady did not go in there."

"I am sure that she did," replied another voice.

"There, now!" thought Savinien; "exactly as I thought! Some criminal has taken shelter in my room, and the police will besiege it. This is a pretty business! Really, I've had no peace since I arrived in Paris."

"I tell you," said the first voice, "that the gentleman in No. 19 came yesterday. The lady asked for the gentleman in No. 26, and she would come up; but she went down again, and has left the hotel. She went away some time ago."

"Twenty-six," thought Savinien; "that is the number of the room occupied by the gentleman who left this morning. The person who was looking for him was a woman. Can it be she, good heavens! who has come into my room?"

"She has not gone out of the hotel," resumed the voice of the second speaker. "I met her at the bottom of the staircase. She went back when she saw me; I followed her; she ran up stairs faster than I did, and I could not catch her, but I distinctly saw her take this passage when she reached the third floor."

"That is no reason why she should be in No. 19, sir. There are seven rooms on the third floor."

"That may be; but this is the first one, and I shall begin with it; and if I do not find her here, I shall look into the rest. I am determined to find her, and find her I will. Open this door."

"In the first place, I have not got the key, and besides——"

"Go and get it."

"There is only one, and you can see for yourself that it is inside."

"Knock!"

"Oh, no; I shall not. The gentleman inside arrived late last night. He is asleep, and I shan't take it upon myself to wake him. The landlord would dismiss me if I did."

"That is nothing to me; and since you don't know what to do, I shall knock myself."

Three loud knocks were now heard, followed by three more at short intervals.

"This is strange," said Savinien to himself. "No one stirs, but some one is there. I must see who it is. However, if I open the door to look into the sitting-room, the maniac outside will hear me."

"You see that he is asleep, since he doesn't reply," resumed the chambermaid.

"Nonsense! I knocked loudly enough to make a deaf man hear me.

If there is no answer, it only proves that she is there, and that this man is her accomplice. Come, open the door yourself!"

"But I cannot, indeed, sir."

"Then I will break down the door."

"You must not do that; I shall call the police."

This threat undoubtedly made some impression upon the man who had spoken, as a spell of silence followed. He said nothing, and did not attempt to break down the door.

"I don't know who you are," said the servant; "but I advise you not to make a disturbance; there is nothing to be gained by that. It would be much better to see the head of the house."

"Well, go and find him."

"Oh, that is soon done, if you will promise to keep quiet until I bring him here."

"I will wait five minutes and no more. And I warn you that I shall keep close to the door, and, as I shan't stir, no one will be able to go out without my leave. If there be any one stirring inside I shall hear, and if I do, I shall take proper measures."

"I will go down, and I shall not keep you waiting long."

All became quiet again. Savinien was greatly perplexed. The adventure was taking a troublesome turn. He did not care to be mixed up in a scandalous affair, but how was this to be avoided? It was impossible to open the door between the rooms without being heard by the man outside, who had just announced that he was about to listen at the outer door. The lady whom he was pursuing evidently reasoned in favour of silence, as she did not stir. And if Savinien did not move, when was the matter to come to an end?

Very probably when the landlord came up. But what would he do? Could he quiet the furious individual and make him listen to reason? This could scarcely be looked for. It was greatly to be dreaded that a fresh attack of rage would take possession of him, and that he would become still more aggressive. In this case Yvonne's cousin would be obliged to show himself, and he was by no means enlivened by the prospect.

Who was this man, and what right had he to enter his rooms? He certainly was not acting in the name of the law. A commissary of police would only have needed to show his scarf of office in order to be admitted, and, besides locksmiths are not scarce.

Husbands have no right to bring them into play, unless with the authorisation of a magistrate; but when they are high tempered they give way to violence of all sorts, and break down doors themselves. Now, there seemed to be a probability that the gentleman who was blockading Savinien's door was a married man, and this likelihood did not make the situation any more agreeable.

What made matters still worse was that the five minutes had now elapsed, and the married man must be tired of waiting. He soon proved that he was so, for a blow from his fist struck the door, and this was followed by a kick which nearly drove the portal in.

Savinien became angry and was about to bring matters to an issue with the infuriated individual who was trying to burst in upon him, when he saw the woman who was pursued standing before him in the doorway between the rooms. She had had the presence of mind not to stir in the little parlour; moreover she had not lost a word of the

threatening words of her persecutor, and she had understood that the least noise would betray her presence.

However the man who pursued her was now proceeding to extreme violence, and she had fled into the inner room, so as to place a second barrier between herself and this madman. It was the instinct of self-preservation that urged her to do this, much more than the idea of placing herself under the protection of a stranger, for she could scarcely be in a condition to reason as to her chances of safety.

When she opened the communicating door and found herself face to face with a young man, she made a motion as if to retreat, but Savinien, who had not lost his head, detained her by the arm, and said to her: "Come in, madame, bolt the door and don't stir whatever happens. I will undertake to receive the person who is breaking into my rooms."

"Save me, sir," murmured the woman in a faint voice.

"Fear nothing," replied the last of the Amaulis, in a tone of voice which left no doubt as to his strength of resolution. "No one shall enter. I answer for that." And he went into the little parlour.

He had scarcely had time to observe that the woman was elegantly clad and closely veiled; but he had the satisfaction of hearing the sharp sound of the bolt as it slipped into its place. The fugitive was for the time at least in a safe place.

As an additional precaution, he took out the key which had remained in the door, and, with his thorn stick in his hand he awaited the enemy's onslaught. Kicks continued, shaking the door, which was becoming insecure and could not long hold out, as it had never been made to withstand such attacks.

Savinien thought it best to reveal his presence before it gave way altogether. "What is the meaning of all this disturbance?" said he, in a loud voice.

"Ah, you have made up your mind to answer at last?" replied the besieging party. "Open at once or I shall break everything down."

"I shall not open till you tell me what you want."

"Ah! that's the way you answer. Well, we shall see!" And a still more vigorous kick bent the lock and split the fastenings.

"I warn you that I am armed, and that if you enter here by force I will break your head," calmly said Savinien.

This native of Brittany was warlike by nature. Danger lent him coolness.

"I will break yours!" howled the man outside, setting his shoulders against the door, as if to give a last decisive shove. The bolt had almost yielded.

Savinien drew back to avoid the shock, with his cane ready and his arm bent. He had taken lessons in the art of self-defence while he was at Rennes. An artillery officer had been his teacher, and he knew perfectly well how to use a stick.

It is the arm used by all young men in his part of the country, and he had sometimes used it against evil-intentioned peasants, who had been taking too much cider, and who had tried to pick a quarrel with him on their way home from market. He, accordingly, thought himself well able to repulse the invader, and did not fear a battle, though after all he was somewhat mortified at being reduced to using a mere stick, like some rustic clown.

"This is a pretty beginning in Paris!" thought he. "My uncle, who

sent me here to complete my social training, would make an ugly grimace if he saw me defending myself with a stick. If it were only a sword he might not feel so badly, as he used to handle that weapon very well himself in bygone days. What would Yvonne think if she knew that I was the knight of a compromised dame?"

These reflections did not make him lose sight of the door which was about to fly to pieces, but at this moment, to his great satisfaction, steps were heard outside. Reinforcements were coming. The landlord of the hotel, warned by the maid, was coming up with two waiters, and this detachment was sufficiently strong to cope with the brawler who was thus disturbing the peace of the inmates of the third floor. Some people had got up and opened their doors to ascertain the meaning of all this noise, so that the gentleman would have to try conclusions with a number of persons, all equally unfavourable in their feelings towards him.

Savinien no longer had to fear being forced to take part in a ridiculous struggle, and he thought proper to show himself. Without stopping to listen to the stormy words exchanged between the hotel-keeper and the angry man, he drew back the bolt and turned the key as well as could be done in the damaged state of the lock.

The door opened, and he found himself in presence of a gentleman whose appearance did not coincide in the least with the ideas conveyed by the kicks. This madly jealous man was very carefully dressed, and his face was not indicative of a fiery disposition. Clad in a black overcoat, his tie arranged with care, and with neatly-cropped whiskers on his cheeks, he resembled a lawyer.

He was certainly a man belonging to the wealthy classes, if not to the best society, and as a usual thing he ought to have been a quiet sort of being. But at this moment he was beside himself. His face was scarlet, and his eyes seemed to be starting out of his head. Everything looked red before these angry eyes of his.

The hotel-keeper and the waiters came round him, and made ready to reduce him to reason if he gave way to further violence. The precaution was a wise one, but it was needless, for on seeing the occupant of No. 19 appear, he made an effort to restrain himself.

By this simple effort at self-control, Savinien saw that the stranger was a man of the world, and this put him at his ease. With an equal, the worst that could occur would be a duel, and the prospect of such a thing did not disturb him.

"Really, sir," said he, "your manner of announcing yourself is very eccentric. I was sleeping soundly when your noise awoke me. What do you want with me, and why have you broken down my door?"

"I don't want you at all," replied the gentleman in a voice husky with rage. "I do not know you."

"What do you want?"

"A woman came in here. I must see her."

"You are crazy! No one has entered here, for the excellent reason that before I went to bed I secured the door which you have been trying to batter down."

"There, what did I tell you?" exclaimed the chambermaid, who had come to the rescue.

"This gentleman came in at four this morning, and alone," added a man servant; "I know that he did, as I was on night-service, and gave him his candle myself. So now!"

"The woman for whom I am looking came here twenty minutes ago," answered the door-smasher.

"Come, sir," said the landlord of the hotel, "you have no right to create a scandal in a respectable house, and I beg of you to go away. This scene has lasted quite long enough, and if you refuse to go of your own free will I shall send to the police station. I presume that you would scarcely like to be taken there yourself, as you appear to belong to polite society, in which people respect themselves under all circumstances."

The hotel-keeper expressed himself in good terms, and the discreet allusion to good breeding had a certain effect. The jealous man began to understand that he would gain nothing by threats, and so he changed his tone.

"Well, sir," said he to Savinien, "I admit that I was wrong to attempt a forcible entrance, but I began by knocking and you failed to reply."

"I told you that I was asleep," replied Yvonne's cousin, who found himself led on from one falsehood to another.

"I am willing to believe you, but now that you are awake you will not refuse to allow me to search your apartment."

"I absolutely refuse! There is no one here, I repeat it. But I shall not permit you to assure yourself of the fact. My word must suffice. Had you taken different measures I might, perhaps, have consented to what you ask, but I beg to tell you that I am not to be forced to do anything."

"The gentleman is in the right," interposed the hotel-keeper, "and I once more beg of you to go, sir. To remain will serve no purpose, for I declare that you shall not go into the room. We are numerous enough to prevent it. Watch the house, if you choose, from the street, but every one of my lodgers is master of his own room, and it is my duty to help him in so being, and to protect the entrance of his apartment."

"Besides, sir," said Savinien, "if you have anything further to demand of me, you will find me at your orders. I am the Viscount d'Amaulis."

"The Viscount d'Amaulis!" exclaimed the breaker-down of doors. "Don't you belong to Brittany?"

"I have just arrived from there," said Savinien, somewhat surprised by the effect produced by his name upon a man whom he had never beheld before. "Do you know me?"

"No. I only know that there is a family named Amaulis in the Ille-et-Vilaine department."

"There is only one person of the name, and I am he."

"Then you are the Baron de Trémorin's nephew?"

"Exactly, but how does that concern you?"

"It doesn't matter," curtly replied the gentleman, whose face wore a singular expression.

The information which he had just received, without asking for it, had produced a strange effect upon him. He no longer threatened, and he spoke in a much lower tone. He was not precisely calm, but he evidently hesitated as to the course to pursue. Savinien profited by this incomprehensible change; it was the moment to settle matters with the angry man, as he now seemed more inclined to listen to reason.

"Come, sir," said Yvonne's cousin, "I do not know who is the object of your search, nor do I care to know. I limit myself to saying that there is no one in my room, and that if there were, I should not permit you to enter. It is therefore useless to insist, and I trust that you will leave me

in peace. I would add, that if you are not satisfied, I am disposed to give you satisfaction when I have learned your name."

"The gentleman is in the right," added the hotel-keeper, "and he is very kind to take things in this way. And as it is my duty to secure tranquillity for my lodgers, if you do not retire without further delay, I assure you that I shall summon the police."

"You should have begun by doing so," said another lodger, who had opened his door and was looking on. "It isn't proper to upset a whole hotel in this way, under the pretext of hunting for a woman."

"You see that every one says that you are in the wrong," resumed the hotel-keeper. "Once more I desire you, for your own sake, to go away."

"Tell me your name," added Savinien, "and we shall meet when and where you wish."

"I need not tell you my name," muttered the intruder, whom every one present was endeavouring to get rid of. "It is sufficient that I know yours, and I will go if you give me your word of honour that no woman entered your room."

This was a skilful trick, and at first threw Savinien off his guard, but he got out of the difficulty by feigning to be pushed beyond his patience.

"Oh, you tire me out!" cried he. "I have nothing more to say to you, and when I assert a thing it must be believed. Go to the devil!" And he shut the door, which still held on after a fashion, in the face of the jealous man.

This done, he slipped the bolt away, and waited without much anxiety for the end of this curious affair. He knew that the attempts at door-breaking would not begin again. The landlord and his servants would prevent that. And however furious the intruder might be, he must see that he could do nothing but retire. And, indeed, after a few more loud words, the talking ceased outside; and Savinien had the satisfaction of hearing that the troublesome personage who had awakened the lodgers was being rapidly led away. The people occupying apartments near by retired to their rooms, and silence prevailed anew.

As an additional precaution, Savinien looked through the window, and saw the disagreeable individual pass across the courtyard, accompanied by the waiters who were urging him on.

"I am rid of him," thought he, "but he is quite capable of mounting guard in the street, and when the poor woman goes out Heaven only knows what will befall her. However, I cannot keep her here for ever."

A slight noise made him turn his head. The door of the bed-room had opened and the fugitive stood before him.

She had not lifted the veil which hid her features as well as a mask; but it was easy to see that she was not very young, although of elegant appearance. In figure, she was tall. A woman's age may be as easily divined by her figure as by her face, and Savinien saw at a glance that the lady before him must have passed beyond her thirtieth birthday by several years. She wore an elegant morning walking-costume, which might have served as travelling attire; an otter-skin hat, somewhat heavy boots, which showed off her slender feet, the instep of which was high; and—a detail which Savinien had not remarked when she had first taken refuge in his rooms—in her small hands, gloved with black kid, she held a casket of polished steel which seemed rather heavy, and which she now placed upon the table of the parlour.

Savinien looked at her very earnestly, and felt much more ill at ease in her presence than in that of the madman who had been pursuing her.

It was the first time in his life that he had met with such an adventure, and he was without any experience as to the manner of getting out of the singular situation in which chance had placed him.

He knew not what to say or do, but it was necessary to decide, and he felt that the affair was by no means cleared up; indeed, that this was but the prologue of a piece, the end of which depended in a great measure upon himself. The strange woman came to his aid. "I have heard all," said she, in a sweet and penetrating voice, the sound of which touched his heart. "You have saved me, and I shall be grateful to you for ever."

"I have done what any one would have done in my place," stammered Savinien.

"Another would not have so courageously given his name to a furious man to turn his anger upon himself. You have sacrificed yourself for me."

"It was quite natural that I should give my name, as he quarrelled with me; but I did not, I confess, expect to see my name produce such an effect on him. I still wonder whether he knew me."

"I did not know the name either, but I shall remember it all my life."

This reply upset all the Viscount d'Amaulis' conjectures. If this man was the husband, the lady ought to have experienced similar surprise on learning his name.

"You must think very ill of me," said she, in a soft voice.

"It is not for me to judge you," replied Savinien, with embarrassment.

"You are a brave man, and I am sure you will not endeavour to find out a woman's secrets. But I wish to tell you why I entered this hotel, and what forced me to hide myself here."

"I declare to you, madame, that I ask you nothing concerning all this."

"I know it, sir, and I also know that if we should meet later on, and you should learn my name, you would not abuse the avowal I am about to make. When you gave me shelter I was flying from my husband."

Savinien inadvertently made a gesture which showed somewhat too clearly that this confession told him nothing that he had not already guessed.

"But I am less guilty than you may think," added the lady. "I did not come here to deceive him. I came to hand the casket which you see to some one in this house. If I told you what it contains and why I brought it, you would learn a sad story, which I have no right to tell, as the secret is not mine alone. My husband, who is ignorant of it, met me in the street and followed me. I had not told him that I intended to go out, and it doubtless appeared strange to him that I should be walking about at so early an hour. He had followed me from a distance and I did not know that he was doing so. I came in, I crossed the courtyard and came up to the floor where the individual whom I wished to see had been lodging. I knocked at his door; it was not opened, and a chambermaid called out to me that the person whom I wished to see was not there. She was wrong, I am sure of it, for I was to be here this morning, and was expected, but I feared to attract attention, and came down stairs again."

"And just as you reached the foot of the stairs you saw your husband in the courtyard."

"Yes. Then I lost my presence of mind, I ran up stairs hastily and



he ran after me. To avoid him I darted along the passage, I found a key in a door, and—you know the rest."

"I know the beginning also," replied Savinien in a low tone, "for I heard what the chambermaid said."

"Then, sir," replied the lady in a different tone of voice, "I must ask one more service of you. It is to go up those stairs, which I dare not mount again for fear of meeting some servant, and, before I go away, to deliver this casket to the person in No. 26."

"I would do so with pleasure, but the gentleman left this morning."

"Gone ! Impossible !" exclaimed the lady.

Her voice trembled, and it was easy to guess that she turned pale under her thick veil.

"I assure you, madame," said Savinien, "that the traveller who lodged on the fourth floor just above this room left this morning at five o'clock."

"The maid spoke the truth, then ?" murmured the strange woman.

"Yes, that gentleman must have taken an early train at I know not what station. I can assure you of this, as I had been dozing in an arm-chair and the noise made by the porters in removing his luggage woke me up."

"Nothing proves that the person who left the hotel was the person whom I wished to find."

"He was a tall, powerful man."

"You saw him ?"

"Yes, at the moment when he was crossing the courtyard."

"He—he was not alone ?"

"No, two porters went before him laden with all sorts of boxes. Among others there was an enormous chest——"

"Excuse me, sir, but that is not what I ask. I should like to know whether a young girl, or rather a child, wasn't with him."

"No, madame, I should certainly have seen her."

"Then it was not he."

Savinien, this time, bowed without replying. He understood nothing from all these broken words, and was not sorry to be able to make the lady understand that she was presuming too much in overwhelming him with questions, the motive of which he did not comprehend.

"Excuse me," murmured she, sinking back upon a sofa, "I am so much troubled that I can scarcely understand what you say."

"Well," thought Savinien, "is she going to stay here ?"

After a moment's silence, however, she resumed in a husky voice : "I entreat you to tell me the truth. I have the greatest possible interest in knowing it."

"I assure you, madame, that I have told it. The gentleman went away alone, and seemed to be setting off on a long journey. He was dressed for such a journey, and wrapped in furs, although it is spring time."

"Then it was he !" cried she. "But how can it be ? I had written that I was coming this morning ; he was expecting me ; so was she."

"She ?" repeated Savinien, with surprise.

"The child."

"The child of whom you speak may have left before the gentleman himself. She was, no doubt, already in the hotel omnibus when I looked out of the window. Since it concerns you, it will be easy to ascertain all this. The servants of the hotel must know, and I will——"

"Do not call them, I beg of you. I have been only too much seen already."

"As for the gentleman," resumed Savinien, who was becoming impatient, "he must certainly have made previous arrangements to leave to-day, for he passed a great part of the night in making preparations. I returned here late, and he had not gone to bed when I came in. I heard him walking about, knocking, and nailing up."

"Nailing up?"

"Yes, indeed. He hammered away for three quarters of an hour. I thought that he must be packing up his purchases. It is probable that I wasn't wrong, for I saw a large chest carried out, a chest which must have been of great weight."

The lady no longer listened to Savinien. She held down her head, and her quick breathing was divined by the heaving of her breast. It was evident that ungovernable emotion kept her silent, and held her to her seat on the sofa.

This silence and immobility did not suit Savinien, whose only wish was that she would depart as soon as possible. He had very willingly interposed to protect her from the violence of her exasperated husband, but he did not care to make himself the perpetual champion of a woman who inspired an instinctive mistrust in his mind.

The acquaintance of this persecuted person with the gentleman in No. 26 seemed to him as suspicious as the proceedings of that personage himself, for what would be thought of a man who spent his nights in driving nails into chests? Savinien detected a drama, and his tastes did not run that way. And if this were only one of those intrigues which crop up at every moment in Paris, he had no wish to be associated with it.

This morning, besides, it was necessary for him to go out, and he wished to dress. Time was passing, and the lady did not seem to think of going away.

"I cannot turn her out," thought he, glancing stealthily at her. And he cudgelled his brains to find some means of getting rid of her without failing in the politeness due to the weaker sex.

But he could find no way. The art of getting out of a delicate situation was not taught at Plouër. Down there at the château, life was uniform, and each person went his way without stumbling. "It is distressing to have so little imagination," he said to himself. "I am sure that if George Fougerey were here he would know what to do at once. To him such an adventure would be nothing but good luck. That is what it is to be a Parisian, and to be able to turn everything to account. I shall never be anything but a simpleton."

Savinien did not, however, need to trouble himself thus, for the lady, shaking off the stupor which had kept her seated, now rose. "Sir," said she, "you have probably saved my life, as my husband would have killed me. You will not, I trust, refuse to save my honour."

"That is too late in the day," thought the viscount, much annoyed by this fresh demand.

"I am going to leave this room where you have had the kindness to allow me to remain at the risk of seriously compromising yourself. I am about to return home. It is likely that my husband awaits me there, and will ask me whence I come. If he sees this casket I am lost."

"This casket!" thought Savinien, who had forgotten the object placed by the fugitive upon the table in the parlour.

"Yes; my husband knows what it contains, and I shall not be able to account to him for having it. I asked you a moment ago to hand it to some one who resided in this hotel——"

"But who, as you now know, no longer resides here," eagerly replied Savinien, who had no desire to be concerned in the matter.

"I believe it, sir, although this sudden departure is unaccountable to me; however, since the person for whom I brought the casket has gone, I beg of you to keep it here."

"But, madame, how can I do that? What should I do with a casket that does not belong to me?"

"You can keep it until I come to claim it."

"That is a responsibility which I cannot assume. How can I take charge of an object to the possession of which you attach so much importance? You do not even know me well enough!"

"I know that you are a brave and loyal gentleman. That is sufficient to make me confide in you."

"Your confidence does me honour, but you forget that, if this casket were found in my possession——"

"If it were, the Viscount d'Amaulis could not be accused of having stolen it; and were you challenged to give it up, you would know how to protect it even as you protected me. But I swear to you that no one shall ever know that it is in your hands."

"I may leave this house any day, even leave Paris, where my stay is limited. What should I do with this deposit in such a case?"

"You will not go away without leaving your address, and if you leave Paris, I know that you are to be found in Brittany; your name must be known there; and I can easily find out where to write to you."

"I live at the Château de Plouër, near Dinan, but——"

"Do not refuse me, sir, I entreat you," said the veiled lady, in a supplicating tone. "I ask it of you in the name of your beloved. At your age men love and are loved. The life of this accursed city has not yet withered your heart. You must have a friend, perhaps a betrothed. I swear to you that if she could see and hear me she would pity me and would add her entreaties to mine that you should become the guardian of this casket."

Savinien started. This unexpected allusion to his pure love moved him. He thought the lady very daring, in the ugly position of her own affairs, to thus invoke these thoughts with regard to a young girl so unlike herself. But he said to himself that this woman, who had run off the social rails, so to speak, was not, perhaps, so guilty as he had at first thought. There was a mystery in this matter which seemed unlike a commonplace conjugal slip.

At this moment a soft tap was heard at the door, and a voice which he recognised said in a low tone: "Be kind enough to open the door, sir. I am the landlord, and I must speak to you at once, in the interest of the person who is with you."

Savinien had not expected this interruption, but soon guessed the cause. It was evident that the husband had not gone off, and that the hotel-keeper had come to warn the lady and her protector against some new danger, perhaps that of an aggressive return of the enraged man who had already made so violent an assault.

Savinien would not, however, decide upon admitting the landlord without the lady's consent. He consulted her by a look, and she un-

hesitatingly replied: "Open the door, sir. Situated as I am, I cannot conceal myself from the people here."

"At all events," said Savinien, "he will not see your face any more than I have seen it myself, and I presume that he can tell you how to get away from here." Thereupon the young fellow slipped back the bolt.

The landlord entered at once, and closed the door behind him. He was a middle-aged man, with a very intelligent face, and had an agreeable expression which at once inspired confidence. He bowed very politely to the lady without trying to discern her features through her veil, and said, addressing Viscount d'Amaulis rather than her: "I should not have taken upon myself to appear, but the case is urgent. The gentleman who made that stormy scene only decided to leave in order to succeed the better in his purpose. He saw that he could not enter the room, and so he has now posted himself at the door of the courtyard."

"I thought so," muttered Savinien.

"When I say 'at the door,' that is not exactly the truth. My waiters would have prevented him from stationing himself there. Fortunately, they watched him, and saw what he was at. He feigned to go off, went towards the boulevard, and even turned the corner of the Rue du Helder, thinking, no doubt, that the lady would not come out for some little time. Then, after having vanished for two or three minutes, he returned, keeping close to the wall over the way, and now he has entered a bye-street which is exactly opposite my house. He had hidden himself as well as he could, which is but badly, and is still there, evidently on the look-out."

"But you are not obliged to tolerate being spied upon," exclaimed the Viscount d'Amaulis.

"It would be difficult to prevent it," replied the hotel-keeper, smiling, "the street belonging, as it does, to every one. I cannot play the police with my neighbours."

"Then I will send him away," answered the impetuous native of Brittany, striding towards the door.

"I beg of you, sir, don't do that," exclaimed the veiled lady. "I cannot allow you to expose yourself to danger for me. It better becomes me to submit to the punishment which my imprudence and my evil fate have brought about. Perhaps, however, something could be done even now. A cab might drive up and I might enter and by lowering the blinds——"

"That way would be scarcely safe," answered the hotel-keeper; "the gentleman from his hiding-place, can plainly see all that is going on down stairs, and he would not fail to follow the cab."

"Then I am lost, for I cannot remain here!"

"I came up, madame, for the purpose of telling you how you can leave here without the slightest danger."

"What! I can——"

"The hotel adjoins another one which is entered by the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin and there is a door of communication," interrupted the landlord.

"What a happy chance!" murmured Savinien, without disguising the delight caused him by this unexpected news.

"And the door is just at the foot of the staircase at the end of the hall," resumed the providential landlord, "so that the lady will not be obliged to enter the court-yard at all. But there is no time to lose. The gentleman may take it into his head to try his previous tactics, and there has been disturbance enough for one day."

"I am ready to follow you, sir," replied the lady, with emotion. "You are saving me, and I swear never to forget it. Monsieur d'Amaulis also has saved me," added she, looking at Savinien, who started on hearing his name uttered by the stranger in whom, in spite of himself he had become interested, although he was annoyed by this disturbance of his peace.

He did not know how to look or what to say to express what he felt, and so kept silence. Under the circumstances, this silence was almost rude, but the lady did not appear to feel it to be so, and she added no more to what she had said. She only thought of her flight, as was natural.

"Come, madame," said the worthy landlord who was so efficaciously aiding her in the serious strait in which she found herself, and who had displayed such perfect tact in this very delicate interview.

She hesitated for an instant, and it was easy to see that before departing, she would have been glad to have given her hand to the generous young man who had defended her, but she had more than one reason for not prolonging the interview, and went out, but not without a glance at him, which flashed from behind her heavy veil of black *blonde*. Savinien, more disturbed than before, followed her to the end of the corridor, and saw with pleasure that no door was opened as the fugitive passed by, led on by the obliging landlord. The inmates of the floor whom the noise had attracted, had returned to their rooms and troubled themselves no more as to the results of the affair. Savinien, leaning over the banisters, saw the lady and her guide go down the three flights and disappear along a dark passage, on their way to the safe exit.

"At last!" murmured he, with a sigh of relief. "I am free! The husband may come back when he likes. I don't care for him now. But what an adventure! Fougerey advised me to plunge into Parisian life. I should say that this was plunging up to the very neck. I have been nearly drowned, for I came very near having a duel on my hands—a duel; and for a woman! A pretty state of things! But all's well that ends well, and it is ended—thanks to my good landlord. Well! I owe him a handsome recompense; and I wonder how I shall best offer it him."

As he was thus congratulating himself on having avoided undesirable results, the viscount returned to his parlour. The first thing that met his eyes as he did so was the steel casket which the lady had left on the table.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "I forgot to return it to her, and I'll wager that she forgot it on purpose when she went away. Just as I was flattering myself that I had made my way out of this labyrinth! It was written that I should be trapped! That woman has a hold upon me now! I am her confidant—her accomplice, perhaps; for heaven only knows what is in this box! What shall I do with it? I have a great mind to pitch it out of the window. What if I ran after this crazy creature who gave me her secrets to take care of? No, I should not catch her; but if she returns in search of her casket, I shall receive her as she deserves to be received; and come she will, no doubt. Meantime I am a most unwilling custodian, and in some way or other I am determined to be rid of my charge."

The viscount had reached this point in his soliloquy, when the hotel-keeper reappeared. "It is done," said he, in a low tone. "I fortunately caught sight of a cab which was not engaged just as we reached the entrance in the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin. The lady got into it, and I can assure you that no one saw her. Now, sir, you can go out by the main

doorway whenever you please. The gentleman who is keeping watch will see you pass by, and, finding you unaccompanied, he will be completely puzzled. He may wait an hour or two more, but he must end by going off."

Savinien was greatly tempted to tell this intelligent landlord all the details of the adventure, and even to consult him, but he thought better not to do so, and merely thanked him warmly.

"Oh, I am only too happy, sir, to have been able to prevent Monsieur de Trémorin's nephew from being annoyed. Your uncle has often done me the honour of putting up here," replied the hotel-keeper.

"If he should come here during my stay in Paris, I should be greatly obliged to you if you will say nothing to him about this ridiculous matter," said Savinien, hastily.

"Oh, it is my business to be discreet."

"Not so discreet, I hope, as not to tell me who was the traveller whose departure this morning has been the cause of so much annoyance to me."

"He was a Swede, who called himself Count Aparanda. I don't fail in my professional discretion in telling you his name, which is on my register, and can be seen by one and all."

"Then the lady who was looking for him was probably a foreigner, also?"

"All that I can tell you is, that she never came here before. The count had no visitors during the eight days which he spent in this house."

"That is strange. The lady spoke of a young girl who ought to have left with him this morning."

"She was mistaken. The count came and left alone."

"Going to Sweden?"

"Oh, I only know that he went to the terminus of the Northern Railway line. He was very uncommunicative, and did not think fit to tell me where he was going."

Savinien had allowed himself to question his host little by little, and as he had begun, he now asked him what he thought of the strange occurrence which had ended without any bad results. The landlord thereupon quietly replied: "These things happen very frequently in Paris. We are used to them. The exit in the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin has been used more than once in this way. But I don't think that lady will ever return. She was very much alarmed."

"Well, I am afraid that she *will* do so. She forgot this casket. I don't know what to do with it."

"If you don't wish to keep it I will place it in my safe; but it would be better to deposit it with your banker until it is reclaimed. In this way neither you nor I can be held responsible."

"I will do so," said Savinien, struck by the idea. "I have business with him this morning, and I will ask him to take charge of it."

The landlord now took leave of the viscount, who made haste to complete his toilet, for it was past ten, and he was very desirous of keeping the appointment which he had made to meet George at Tortoni's that day. He longed to tell him the events of the morning, in order to prove that he was not so countrified as he appeared.

## II.

Two hours after the fortunate termination of this complicated affair Savinien was walking along the Boulevard des Italiens. It was a lovely spring morning, and he felt the need of walking to clear his head. He had recovered from his annoyance, but his brain ached and the open air revived him.

Savinien, when at Plouër, never breakfasted until he had taken a walk of five or six miles at the pace of a gymnast, and this merely to give himself an appetite. He did not wish to set aside so healthy a practice.

He did not, therefore, take a cab to make the visits which he had decided upon. Those which he required to make on the left hand of the Seine might be put off till the afternoon, the dowagers of the Faubourg Saint-Germain never receiving before four. But business people are to be seen in the morning, and Savinien had arranged his programme for the day accordingly.

He determined to go, in the first place, to his uncle's banker with the two letters—one of recommendation and the other of credit—given to him by M. de Trémorin before his departure, and then to meet George Fougeray at Tortoni's, and later on to cross the Seine to make formal visits in his own name and that of the baron to some relatives with whom he was but little acquainted. And in order to avoid the trouble of returning to his hotel he had dressed for the evening.

It must not be supposed that he had fallen into such a mistake as to put on a dress-coat and white tie in the morning. He was not so countrified. But he wore a black Albert buttoned over a white waistcoat, grey pantaloons and patent leather boots, a style of attire which Parisians who pride themselves upon elegance do not usually assume till later in the day. And still another social solecism—he carried a large parcel wrapped in a newspaper in his hand.

The Viscount d'Amaulis knew very well that it was not customary for a gentleman to carry a parcel in the street, even though it were but a roll of notepaper, but he wished to take a walk as usual, and, besides, to rid himself of the casket which the unknown lady had voluntarily forgotten in the apartment of her champion. Since Savinien had been delivered from this mysterious person, he had reflected a great deal as to the bad plight in which she had placed him by leaving the casket behind her, and he had decided to follow the advice of the hotel-keeper.

He thought that the casket would be much safer in a banking-house than in the wardrobe of a hotel room, and that it would be time enough to reclaim the deposit when the lady appeared and asked for it. "And if she does not do so," thought he, "I am not responsible. The casket can remain at the banker's till the end of time."

Savinien was like a child who believes that everything moves on in the simplest manner, and he counted upon getting out of his difficulty by means which presented obstacles of which he had no idea. He had taken care, on leaving the hotel, to hide the casket under his arm lest the husband should be concealed near by, and this was wisely done, as he saw him crouching at the end of a by-street.

Savinien passed by, however, without appearing to observe him, but on

turning the Rue du Helder he glanced back. The jealous man did not show himself.

"Good!" said Savinien to himself; "he hopes that his wife is still inside, and he will play the sentinel till to-morrow. He must have seen me, however, but it isn't I he wants. He knows my name, he knows that I have just arrived from the country, and he must believe that if I have played a part in this matter it is purely by accident. He will let me alone, and as for his faithless one, he may wait as long as he pleases. She must have reached home long ago. When they meet there will be an odd interview. I should like to see it if only to laugh at these Parisians, who think that no one can deceive them. Really, husbands are not so stupid in Brittany, nor are wives so faithless. It must be admitted, however, that at Dinan, and even at Saint Malo, they have fewer facilities for evading their husbands. Houses don't have two doors there like the Rue du Helder hotel."

This soliloquy occupied the viscount till he reached the Boulevard des Capucines. The banking-house for which he was bound was situated in the Avenue de l'Opéra, and the road to reach it was neither long nor dreary.

When the winter is over, only a sun ray is needed to bring all Paris out of doors. The roadway was crowded with vehicles, and passers-by elbowed one another on the wide sidewalks. It was not yet the hour, however, at which fashionable women appear in their spring attire. Only people in a hurry could be seen hastening on in every direction.

"Where are they going?" murmured Savinien, feeling quite giddy, in the midst of this tornado; "they flutter about like leaves in a high wind. They look as though they were crazy or delirious—with a gold-fever perhaps. They are running after fortune. Much good may it do them! I would rather never catch it than have it cost me so much trouble."

He endeavoured to stem the tide, when he suddenly came up against a gentleman, who cried out: "Take care! where are you going?"

"What, is it you?" exclaimed Savinien, recognising his friend Fougerey.

"What! what! already out? You didn't sleep long, it seems," replied George, laughing.

"I didn't sleep at all."

"Where are you going so early?"

"To Monsieur Montauron, the banker, in the Avenue de l'Opéra."

"Is it the man or his cash-box you wish to call upon?"

"Both, though I don't absolutely need money, thanks to our game of cards."

"Get some, it will do no harm; but if you wish to see the great Montauron, I warn you that the chances are that you won't find him in the Avenue de l'Opéra."

"Why not?"

"Because he doesn't live there. His banking-house is there, no doubt, but though he goes there every day it isn't at this hour."

"Where does he reside?"

"At his own house, not far from the Parc Monceau. However, you will certainly find his partner, who will give you your money. That is the main thing. Ask him to show you over the house, the vaults especially; they will interest you. But don't stay too long, as I must be on 'Change from one till two—there is a stroke to make; I will explain it to you. I haven't time to breakfast at Tortoni's, it is too far from the shop. Come



to Champeaux' on the Place de la Bourse instead. You know it, eh ? Ah, you went there with your uncle once. Very good ; now I'm off ! ”

“ He is as crazy as the rest of them ; off he goes and vanishes ! ” muttered Savinien. “ I should never get used to a life like that of a squirrel in a revolving cage. ”

He resumed his road to the Avenue de l'Opéra, although the information given him by George had upset his calculations. Uncle Trémorin had urged him to see M. Montauron himself, and he had just learned that the latter lived half a league away from his banking-house. Savinien thought for a moment of putting off the visit till another day, but he reflected that the partner would undoubtedly tell him how to find the head of the house, and so he continued walking on.

Two minutes later he had reached the door of a handsome building. It was so large and so handsome, indeed, that the Viscount d'Amaulis thought at first that he had mistaken the number in coming down the Avenue de l'Opéra.

At Saint Malo, and even at Rennes, the banking-houses are of plain appearance. Savinien, no doubt, expected to see handsome ones in Paris, but he did not suppose that financial business was carried on in perfect palaces. Now, the front of the building which he saw before him had so imposing an appearance that he felt himself seized with a respectful hesitation in approaching the capitalists who had constructed such a palace.

However, this was, undoubtedly, the house he sought. Above the door, as wide and as high as a triumphal arch, there was a black marble plate, on which was inscribed in letters of gold :

“ THE PROVINCIAL BANK, ”

and somewhat lower down in less conspicuous lettering came the words :

MONTAURON & Co.,

BANKING AND COLLECTION OF ACCOUNTS.

To judge by all this splendour, the establishment founded and carried on by uncle Trémorin's banker must be one of the most noted in all Paris. Savinien was in no wise surprised that it should have been selected by his uncle ; but he was rather astonished that the owner of Plouër should be so intimate with so weighty a financier as to write to him privately with relation to his nephew's affairs.

The letter of credit was easily understood ; M. de Montauron was undoubtedly the correspondent of the Saint Malo firm which had issued it to M. de Trémorin. But the letter of recommendation was almost incomprehensible, for the Provincial Bank had never been mentioned at the château, and Savinien had heard the name of M. Montauron for the first time on the eve of his departure.

“ Don't fail to see him the morning after you arrive, ” Yvonne's father had said. “ He is an excellent man, though a new-comer and of different opinions to ours. He will receive you well, and will enable you to enter society—which will be advantageous to you. ”

Savinien remembered that his far-seeing uncle had, on his last journey to Paris, established business relations with this gentleman, still he never imagined that Montauron was at the head of a first-class establishment. The Baron de Trémorin had a snug little fortune in land, but in Brittany landowners have little capital to dispose of, especially for vast banking operations, and Savinien did not imagine that his uncle could

have shares in the Provincial Bank. How was it, then, that the gentleman-farmer was so free with the prince of finance?

"Who knows?" said Savinien to himself, "they perhaps travelled together at one time. Why shouldn't this Montauron have been in the navy in his youth? It doesn't matter to me after all. I risk nothing in going to call on him. If he receives me coldly I shall refrain from calling again, and my uncle can have no fault to find. While I wait till he does me the honour to receive me I can present my letter of credit to his clerks and ask them to put this confounded casket in their vaults."

And, to end the hesitation of which he felt quite ashamed, he ran up the four steps leading to the *penetralia*. He found himself in a vast hall, paved with green marble and having doors on all sides—a hall, or rather a court, with a great display of glass, and innumerable counters. The walls were covered with inscriptions, precisely as at the Treasury, and numerous clerks seated behind gratings were handling bundles of notes or rolls of gold.

There were people before the gratings and others at the tables, where memoranda were made or cheques endorsed; there were people everywhere. Millions enclosed in portfolios circulated through the crowd, and no one turned to see them pass. There was a perpetual going and coming, an incessant buzz, which might be taken for muttered prayers to the god of wealth.

These people looked as though they knew no other, and the Viscount d'Amaulis remembered his dream. "Only the Golden Calf is needed here," thought he. "It would have a fine effect in the middle of this temple for current accounts."

To tell the truth, he was quite at sea, and looked rather foolish with his casket under his arm. However, a superintendent, who wore on his livery a military medal and the cross of the Legion of Honour, asked him very politely what he wished, and at the mere words "letter of credit" showed him which staircase to mount. Letters of this kind were always looked over on the first floor. This staircase was superb, broad and easy to ascend, like those of museums or royal abodes, and it led to an ante-room much more luxuriously decorated than the drawing-room of the manor of Plouër.

Savinien explained his business to a servant as imposing as a beadle, to whom he learned that he must intrust the letter, and a memorandum of the sum he wished to receive. The nephew had not forgotten that his uncle had especially urged upon him not to run through his credit too soon, and so he inscribed the modest sum of a thousand francs.

"I shall be taken for a pauper," thought he, while he awaited the return of the servant covered with gold lace, who had undertaken to carry to a head clerk the last of the Amaulis' meagre appeal for funds. He did not wait long, however, and was surprised to hear the servant, who returned empty-handed, say that M. Bouret would like to speak to him.

"Who is Monsieur Bouret?" he asked timidly.

"Monsieur Bouret is the under-manager of the Provincial Bank," replied the servant with marked respect.

"Very well. Take me to him," replied Savinien with an air of indifference. He was secretly quite abashed. He asked himself whether the gentleman in question imagined that his letter was a forgery.

The flunkey opened a door ornamented with gilt nails, and respectfully requested Savinien to step forward.

At the same time, from the further end of a room which looked like a prime minister's study, a man with a pleasant face came forward, with both hands extended, to meet the young native of Brittany, who had stopped on the threshold, fearing to walk forward.

"What! viscount," he said, "you do us the injustice to present yourself like a stranger, through a letter of credit? Fortunately, I caught sight of your name on reading it, and took the liberty of sending for you. I should never have forgiven myself had you left without hearing from me how happy we are to place ourselves entirely at your disposal."

"Excuse me, sir," replied Savinien, amazed by this reception. "I was not aware that you knew me, and I——"

"You mean that you had not yet done us the honour of coming to see us; but your uncle speaks of you in every letter. He announced your coming a week ago, and we were expecting you."

"I was ignorant that my uncle——"

"Had an interest in our house? You surprise me greatly. He has one, and has had it for a long time past. But you remind me that Monsieur de Trémorin is very reserved as regards his business matters," added M. Bouret, with a smile. "I shall imitate him, and confine myself to repeating that we are at your orders."

"I am extremely obliged to you. My uncle told me to hand a private letter to Monsieur Montauron."

"Montauron isn't here. He seldom comes in the morning, but he will be delighted to have you call on him in the Avenue Ruysdaël, close to the Parc Monceau. And, although Monsieur de Trémorin did not send you personally to me, I hope that we shall meet elsewhere than in this office. I flatter myself that I may be able to put you in the way of enjoying yourself, for I have remained a bachelor, and I suppose that you have come to Paris to have a gay time of it. It belongs to your age rather than mine to do so; but I have not unharnessed yet, and you may see that in spite of my forty-two years I am lively enough still."

"I do not doubt it, sir," replied Savinien, quite bewildered by these singular offers of service; "but it is not only to amuse myself that my uncle sent me away for six months."

"Good! uncles never do, but it is understood all the same. Yours has too much experience not to know that a young man cannot live here like a hermit. He has opened a credit of six thousand francs to begin with, but he means to renew it next month."

"I think not. He told me, on the contrary, that it must suffice me."

"Then you are really serious in asking to-day for only fifty louis?"

"Yes, indeed. I shall draw out that amount every month."

"You may take what you please, and what you draw shall figure on my personal account. It would look bad if the Viscount d'Amaulis, the Baron de Trémorin's nephew, should be obliged to apply to usurers to pay a betting or a gambling debt. But we are talking standing and that is very tiresome. Be kind enough to sit down, pray, and let me take your parcel, which seems to be very heavy."

"My parcel? Yes," replied Savinien, who had scarcely expected to be questioned as to the famous casket by this agreeable and somewhat over familiar gentleman.

He would have preferred to have spoken about it to a subordinate who would have said merely yes or no, without taking the liberty to interro-

gate him, while the under-manager of the Provincial Bank might perhaps ply him with questions.

"Is this a deposit to be made with us?" resumed M. Bouret, laughing.

"Exactly," replied the viscount, profiting by this unexpected opening.

"You could not find a better place; our house has a special place for deposits, and we have organised an ingenious way of installing them, such indeed as you will not find elsewhere. Shall I show you our contrivance?"

"I should be very glad to know what it is."

"Well then, it is this: at the Bank of France, and elsewhere, deposits are only received if open. You want to deposit silver or diamonds, let us say. The silver is weighed, the stones are estimated, and an engagement is made to give you, in case they should be lost, an amount equal to the estimate. We do better than that. We don't care to see; you bring us a case as big as a wardrobe, or a box that you can hold in your hand; we take it without troubling ourselves about what it contains. Still, we guarantee its safety?"

"But if a casket which is empty or filled with sand or pebbles were brought to you, what then?"

"That does not concern us. We return the casket as received."

"But should it be lost, what would you do?"

"That is impossible. You will soon understand that when you see our safety-locks. Have you any time at your disposal?"

"Not much. I am expected elsewhere at noon."

"You have still forty minutes, then. That will suffice to visit our vaults. Besides, it is necessary for you to go down to them as you are going to make a deposit. With us, the person making the deposit locks it up himself. You will see why this is necessary. What is the object which you wish to deposit?"

"It is this," replied Savinien, unfolding the paper which enveloped the casket.

"Very good. It will not fill the compartment which we shall assign to you."

"The compartment?"

"Explanations only detain us. I will show the place to you."

"Oh! I ask all this because the casket does not belong to me. It has been left in my care, and, as I am staying at a hotel, I do not wish to keep it by me."

"You are quite right. You don't, then, know the value of the contents?"

"No, not at all. There may be nothing but papers in the casket, although that seems unlikely, from the weight of it."

"It doesn't matter. This isn't the first time that we have taken charge of papers—letters, for instance, and some are very precious," added M. Bouret, with a knowing smile. "Love letters, for instance, or compromising documents,—we receive them with our eyes shut. It is likely that some compartments in our vaults hide family secrets, and I assure you that they are safer there than anywhere else. Now we have only to go down. I will send word by telephone to the clerk, who will prepare your subscription card, and to the servant who is at the gate of the vaults."

With this M. Bouret took up the mouthpiece of one of Edison's ingenious contrivances, and began a conversation with one of his distant subordinates.

While he was applying his lips and ears alternately to the orifice of the

tube, Savinien had an opportunity to look at the financier, who did not in the least correspond with the idea he entertained as to the head of a banking-house. M. Bouret was tall, with a good figure, and dressed with taste and elegance. He wore a slight black moustache, and little whiskers shaved at the ear-line. His face was open and intelligent, his eyes quick, and his motions easy. He appeared scarcely thirty-five.

In the country a banker is almost always a serious and majestic individual, easily to be mistaken for a magistrate.

"If Monsieur Montauron resembles his partner," thought Savinien, "the Provincial Bank is ruled by swells. This under-manager looks like a gay fellow."

"It is done," said M. Bouret, turning round. "There is some one now making a deposit, but he has almost finished. The place will be free. Come, viscount."

Savinien, with his casket under his arm, silently followed in the wake of the obliging manager, who insisted upon personally doing the honours of the establishment and its curiosities. M. Bouret descended a staircase reserved for his special use, and led the young native of Brittany, in the first place, to an office on the ground floor, where Savinien saw an individual almost as handsomely attired as his superior.

"At Saint Malo, counter jumpers wear false sleeves of green alpaca," thought Savinien. "This house must have a great deal of money to employ fellows who dress like dandies."

"Be good enough to give the Viscount d'Amaulis his subscription card," said M. Bouret to his subordinate.

This was done at once. Savinien received a sort of ticket bearing his name and a number. He was utterly ignorant of the use to be made of this card, but refrained from asking premature questions. After this transient pause M. Bouret resumed his course down some stairs which led to the depths of the vaults, and Savinien followed him.

The subterranean journey interested him. It was novel to him, coming from a château where the cellars only served to keep a few hogsheads of burgundy and several barrels of cider.

He had expected to be astonished by the sight of piles of gold, or, at least, of bags containing the precious metal; of rivers of diamonds, and showers of pearls, and said to himself that his coffer would make a poor show among such treasures, but after going down thirty steps or so, he found himself before a grating, behind which there was a robust young man in the livery worn by the subordinate retainers of the bank. This man, an overseer, bowed respectfully, and removed his cap on seeing M. Mouret.

"There is a depositor in the vault, sir," said he, "but he will soon be out again."

"Let us wait, then," said M. Bouret, addressing Savinien. "We are not in the habit of disturbing our customers while they are here. It won't take long, and, in the meantime, I will explain how things are done. You see the vault running along by the second grating there?"

Savinien saw a long vaulted hall brilliant with gas-lights, and upon the white walls he espied symmetrical rows of plates which looked like black spots. The entrance to this place was protected by two gratings several yards apart.

"It looks solid, doesn't it?" said M. Bouret. "It is built of Roman cement, and defies pickaxe, pickpoint, and fire. It may be inundated or

filled with sand in case of an attack from outside. Do you think that your casket will be safe enough?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! Will it be alone! I don't see a single box."

"There are some here, however, and I will show you presently where they are kept. Now, look over there. What do you see?"

"Two men, one of them running his hands along the wall."

"That is the depositor. He is just closing his compartment."

Savinien did not understand; but, on more attentively examining the persons at the end of the hall, whose backs were turned towards him, he was very much surprised to see that the taller one wore a long overcoat trimmed with fur, precisely like that of the traveller whose early departure had so greatly distressed the veiled lady.

"I must be wrong," thought Savinien; "the neighbour who caused me such annoyance of all kinds last night and this morning, is now travelling on the Northern line. He cannot be here, as he has started for Sweden."

"Did that gentleman bring a friend with him?" asked M. Bouret of the overseer.

"No, sir;" replied the man, in a respectful tone, "he came with a porter. The chest which he had to deposit was so heavy that he could not carry it himself, and I was even obliged to help the porter to place it in the compartment."

"Is the gentleman one of our old customers?"

"No, sir; he is a new one."

"You see, viscount, that our system gains in favour. There is no day on which we don't let one or more compartments."

"Ah! you call that 'letting?'"

"Yes, that is the word; we let out, for more or less time, the privilege of using a compartment, in which people may place anything that they desire."

"Then I shall be your 'tenant,'" said Savinien, smiling.

"Exactly; and we shall be proud to have you, as you may write and tell your uncle."

"I shall tell him of the cordial reception which you have given me, but——"

"Good! I conjecture what you wish to say. You prefer that Monsieur de Trémorin should not know your private affairs. We understand that, and you may rely on our discretion. This vault is the tomb of secrets."

"It is indeed a tomb. Those arches and lamps——"

"Ah, the gentleman is ringing to have the gate opened for him to go out. It is our turn at last. I beg your pardon for having detained you; but we strictly adhere to our rules. Every subscriber has a right to remain alone until he finishes his business."

The overseer, while his superior was speaking, unlocked the door so as to allow the depositor to depart, and he advanced, followed by a railway porter. Savinien now saw the gentleman distinctly, and the more he looked at him, the more he seemed to him to be the same man who at five in the morning had crossed the court-yard of the hotel. He could not recognise him by his face, as he had seen only his back from the window; but the costume was absolutely the same. Everything was there, overcoat, cap, and furred boots.

This strange individual might be about forty-five years old and he had an unpleasant face. His eyes and nose reminded one of a bird of

prey. His heavy eyebrows met, and he wore a full beard, thick and jet black, such as is never seen in Sweden. His look was haughty, almost insolent. He passed before the viscount and the sub-director without even touching his fur cap.

The porter was more polite however, and when he raised his cap, Savinien saw that it was marked with the letter N.

"Decidedly," muttered he, "it is the traveller of No. 26. The hotel-keeper told me that he had taken the Northern line, and it is evident that this man now comes from the terminus, and has had his baggage brought here by a man in the employ of the company."

"Do you know that eccentric-looking individual?" asked M. Bouret, seeing how inquisitively Savinien looked at the stranger.

"No, but I should like to know his name."

"Nothing easier. As we go up we will ask the clerk who gives out the tickets. May I ask, however, why you wish to know it?"

"Oh, it is merely for curiosity's sake. The gentleman resembles some one who was staying at the hotel where I have put up, and who left this morning, saying that he was about to leave Paris."

"He looks as though he intended doing so, as he is dressed for travelling. People do not wrap themselves up like that in the month of April unless they are going to travel."

"That is true, and I am wondering why he has come to the vaults of the Provincial Bank."

"That is easy to see. He doesn't wish to carry about a chest full of valuables, and has come here to store it away safely."

"He ought to have done so before."

"Certainly, but some persons leave everything till the last moment. Here, there is very little formality, and the gentleman probably knew that he wouldn't be long about the matter. But we are losing time, viscount; let us go on, if you please."

The man with the furred boots had disappeared up the staircase, and Savinien, who did not intend to run after him, although much puzzled by the encounter, followed without any more delay the obliging financier, who served him as guide.

"Be kind enough," said M. Bouret, "to examine the distribution of the vaults. You see the molten plates on the walls?"

"Yes, what purpose do they serve?"

"These plates are doors which hermetically close a cavity in the body of the wall. Have you ever travelled in Spain?"

"Never," answered Savinien, with surprise. "I know only Brittany and Paris."

"I ask you this, because in Spain the singular practice exists of placing the dead in the walls of cemeteries instead of burying them. We follow a similar course; but, instead of placing coffins in our compartments, our subscribers leave chests and caskets like yours in them, or bags and baskets, if such be their fancy."

"Each person has his own compartment, then?"

"His own private and personal compartment; so long as he pays the rent no one can open it."

"No one except yourself, I suppose, or Monsieur Montauron."

"No one. Neither the director nor myself. You will see that it would be impossible to do so. Be good enough to show me the number upon your ticket."

"It is 919," replied Savinien, having glanced at his card.

"All right! Let us go on. Look for the plate bearing that number. You see there is a row of tablets arranged in order. All those before which we are now passing close a compartment already filled. Ah! here is yours."

"The key is in the lock."

"Certainly. When you have made your deposit you must have the key at hand; your take it away with you after locking up. Observe that all the doors of the vacant compartments near by also have their keys."

"Yes, and those of the ones already let haven't."

"Yes, all the compartments on that side are filled, as far as the one intended for you. We let them in regular order. The gentleman who deposited that chest immediately before you has No. 918, and like those before him he has taken away his key. The one coming after you will be 920."

"Very well, I understand. So it is there that the chest is placed, which the man with the hook nose had brought here by a porter," muttered Savinien, as he examined with anxious attention the tablet numbered 918.

"Yes, you will be neighbours. Your casket will be near his chest, but you won't meet here again. It is quite exceptional that we should have presented ourselves at the gateway before he had finished what he was about, and, observe we did not pass it. Now, viscount, I take the key and open, as you see. Note that ten caskets like yours would set easily in this hollow, as it is much deeper than its width."

"A man might lie in there," exclaimed Savinien.

"Yes, if he were not too big," replied M. Bouret, laughing. "Put in your casket, if you please. There now, it is done! Now look at these four brass knobs projecting outside."

"Oh! I know their purpose. My uncle has a safe with a combination-lock like this. Each knob corresponds with the alphabetical letters, and on all of them being turned a word of four letters is formed. A screw is then pressed inside and the chosen word immediately becomes the 'Open Sesame!' of the 'Arabian Nights.' You close the door, efface the word by turning the knobs back, and in order to open the door again the word must be known. The key does not work unless the letters are put in their places."

"I need not tell you, then, what you have to do. Choose a word, remember it, and work the knobs. I will go a few steps off and look towards the gateway. You must not let me see the word. Our entire system rests upon the fact that only the depositor can open his compartment. When he wishes to do so, or to see that it is secure, he has only to ask for the clerk whom you already saw, show his card and enter the vault, where the overseer, apprised of his coming by telephone, lets him enter alone. No one looks on, and he may take out a part of his valuables or add others."

"The system is admirable; but supposing the card with the number of the compartment were lost the finder could use it."

"He wouldn't know the word, viscount, and as he could not guess it, I defy him to touch the deposit. I will now turn my back to you. Think of some word, if you please; form it, efface it, and take out the key."

Savinien thought of his cousin's name; and as it comprised too many letters for four knobs, he used only the first four. "It is done,"



said Savinien, after having effaced the letters forming the masculine name Yvon, there being no room to form the much sweeter one of Yvonne.

"Very well," said the agreeable under-manager; "now, viscount, you are at home. The entry will be free to you whenever you wish, and you won't need to have me with you. But I should be obliged if you would be kind enough to return to my office now. It is I who looks over letter of credit accounts. And that reminds me that I kept your letter up-stairs and that you have not received the thousand francs which you require. Excuse my blunder. It is easily repaired, and to save you the trouble of going up stairs, I will, if you like, send it down to you, providing you give me a few minutes."

"Thank you, sir," said Savinien, who had just glanced at his watch; "but it is almost noon and I am obliged to leave you. I can easily do without the money to-day, and——"

"Well, I will send you the money and the letter of credit. They shall be at your hotel before evening, if you wish."

"That is quite unnecessary, sir. I will call to-morrow, if you will allow me. And now I must say good morning. I am awaited elsewhere."

"Then I will not insist upon keeping you. No doubt you will have agreeable company at breakfast. I wish that I were in your place, but my duties keep me here till five o'clock. Everything falls upon me when Monsieur Montauron is not here, and I must say that he doesn't appear often. However, I make up for all this in the evening."

"May I ask you at what time I should be likely to find Monsieur Montauron at home?"

"It is hard to say. Montauron has been going about a great deal lately. But call in the morning and you will be likely to find him. I will tell him that you intend to call, and he will probably invite you to dinner. You had better accept. He has an excellent cook, and will introduce you to his wife, who is charming. Now, good morning, viscount, and merry moments to you! How lucky you are to breakfast with ladies! Those breakfasts are going out of fashion. Our pretty women generally get up now at such late hours. If you could restore the agreeable habits of my youth I should be infinitely obliged to you."

"I am only going to breakfast with a gentleman friend."

"Excuse me, then. I thought seeing you in such a hurry——"

"I mustn't keep him waiting, as he is obliged to be on 'Change."

"He's right. There'll be money made there to-day, and if you would take a hint from me—but no, your friend can advise you as well as I; he is in business, I suppose?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him for years, and only found him again yesterday."

"Excuse the liberty I take if I ask his name."

"He is named George Fougeray."

"Ah, indeed! He is a very smart man."

"You know him?"

"I know everybody. If I ask this question, which may appear a freedom, it is in your interest. You have just come to Paris, and not knowing one man from another, you might have fallen into bad hands. But Fougeray is in a good position, and very well known. He may be useful to you."

"I am greatly obliged to you, sir, for your views regarding him, and

"I have the honour of wishing you good morning," replied Savinien, who felt somewhat piqued.

Still he allowed M. Bouret to shake hands with him in the warmest manner, and to accompany him to the foot of the main staircase, which he mounted rapidly, to prevent the agreeable financier from taking the trouble to accompany him further. This staircase had a landing communicating with the grand hall. Savinien crossed this hall, now more crowded than before, and went out.

He was anxious to breathe the fresh air. The vaults were disagreeable to him, and the noise of the busy crowd in the hall half stunned him. He began to walk up the Avenue de l'Opéra, but had scarcely taken ten steps when he thought of going back again. The man with the furred boots was uppermost in his mind, and he remembered that he had forgotten to ask his name of the clerk who gave out the tickets.

It was rather late to repair this mistake, however. M. Bouret must have returned to his office; the viscount did not care to disturb him, and could not question the subordinate except in his presence. Besides, after all, what did it matter to Yvonne's cousin if the depositor whom he had encountered was the gentleman who had left the hotel so early and called himself Count Aparanda?

Savinien hoped to hear no more of him or of the strange woman who had got him into such a strait. He had freed himself of his responsibility by getting rid of the casket, and he said to himself that if the lady reclaimed it there would be nothing further to do than simply remove it from the vaults of the Provincial Bank.

"She cannot find fault with me," thought he. "I could not have done better; her secret is guarded like a treasure." And he resumed his walk towards the Bourse.

Following the Rue du Quatre-Septembre, which led to the temple of speculation, he reflected upon the interview, which he had just had with M. Bouret, and wondered why that gentleman had welcomed him so warmly. It is not customary to make so much of the bearer of a letter of credit for a paltry six thousand francs, and the title of viscount is not one to dazzle the lords of gold. Could it be that his uncle Trémorin had a large interest in the banking house? This seemed unlikely, for Savinien was not aware that M. de Trémorin possessed any other fortune than his lands in Brittany, which brought him, whether times were good or bad, some thirty thousand francs yearly. It is true that this amount was not expended at Plouër, and that the baron might have laid by some money in thirty years.

"Upon my word," said Savinien to himself, "I should be glad of it for Yvonne's sake, and I don't know why I shouldn't take advantage of the good wishes of these gentlemen to enliven my stay in Paris. Monsieur Bouret does not exactly please me. He throws himself too much at one's head, and I shall be careful not to make use of the unlimited credit he offered. I shan't care for his company when I want to enjoy myself. George is enough for me. Monsieur Montauron must be another sort of man, however. He is married and lives in style. If he receives me as pleasantly as his partner has done, I shall be on visiting terms with him, and I will gladly avail myself of the opportunity to see a little of the financial world. My uncle advised me to see everything. I shall obey him. But I shan't fail to be cautious, for six thousand francs won't go very far. These people talk about millions just as we talk of crowns in Brittany."

The Rue du Quatre-Septembre was long, but it appeared short to Savinien, so busy was his mind. Twelve had struck at the clock of the Bourse when he found himself in front of the door of Champeaux' restaurant where his friend was waiting for him. The street was crowded, and he had some trouble in gliding through the number of vehicles encumbering it in all directions. The room which he now entered proved no less noisy than the street. All the tables were occupied, and it was necessary for him to open a way through groups of people breakfasting, in order to reach the spot where George was seated finishing a dozen of oysters. On catching sight of Savinien, Fougeray abruptly exclaimed: "My dear boy, I began without you; you must catch up with me, and you had better swallow two mouthfuls at a time, as we have only half an hour."

"Why are you in such a hurry?" asked Savinien.

"Didn't I tell you this morning on the boulevard? To-day is the great encounter. The battle of liquidation, in a word. There will be something new. The day will be a brisk one, and you could not have a better one to begin looking into matters a little."

"But why should I do so? Did you imagine that I came to Paris to speculate on 'Change'?"

"You play baccarat."

"That isn't the same thing. I know nothing about stock-gambling, and I have no money to speculate with."

"Nonsense! you wouldn't be sorry to win a few thousands."

"I should be very sorry to lose them."

"You wouldn't lose them. I only operate on a sure basis. I will explain all that to you presently. Let us breakfast first and then rush off. I ordered for two—chops, eggs, and truffles, and here are your oysters. Let us begin and pour out some of this delicate Grave wine."

Savinien, who was as hungry as a hawk, did not need to be urged.

"Well," asked George, after a moment, "did you find Montauron?"

"No; but I saw the under-manager of the Provincial Bank, who received me as if I had been a prince."

"You are a viscount. That is quite enough for Bouret, who, being a parvenu, adores titles."

"Ah, he is a parvenu, then?"

"Yes, indeed! He began without a copper. But he is very smart."

"That is exactly what he says of you."

"You told him, then, that you knew me?"

"Yes. Do you object to that?"

"Not the least in the world. But let me ask how you came to mention me."

"I don't know exactly how it happened. Ah! I was saying that I was expected by a friend who was going on 'Change, and he asked who it was."

"That doesn't surprise me. The fellow meddles with everything. I'll wager that he offered you the favour of his company to enable you to 'see life.'"

"He offered me a great deal more. He put his private purse at my disposal. He probably imagines that my uncle has a large fortune, which will come to me some day or other."

"I suppose that is it. I'll wager that your uncle is much richer than you suppose, for Bouret never does anything without a motive. If he offered to lend you some money, it is because he knows perfectly well that

Baron de Trémorin is to be depended upon, and wouldn't leave his nephew in an awkward position. Your uncle must have a large amount invested in the Provincial Bank."

"I thought the same. But I don't see how he could have made any large investments unknown to any of his family."

"My dear boy, all country people have a mania for economising and telling no one what they do with their savings. Your uncle is a man of the sort."

"I grant it. I admit that he must have a reserve fund, but I don't believe that he is a shareholder to any large amount in a banking house of such importance."

"You don't understand these things. In the first place, the Provincial Bank isn't so grand as all that, and, besides, even the most important financial concerns don't scorn the money of small landholders, and when the latter invest large sums, they have a way of making much of them, as is only fair. It is strange you should be so surprised that your uncle may be interested in a Parisian bank. You are wrong; it only proves that he is more clever than most of his neighbours."

"I believe that, but I wonder how he can have amassed a sum of any consequence to such a banking-house as that of Monsieur Montauron's."

"My dear fellow, I see that you haven't the least idea of compound interest. What is your uncle's income?"

"Thirty thousand francs a year, derived from land."

"Excellent! At the rate at which you manage matters down there in Brittany, already that means a capital of six or seven hundred thousand francs or more. But Monsieur de Trémorin does not want to sell, and he is right. Land doesn't go down like stocks. How long has he owned this property?"

"Thirty years at least."

"Very good. Let me calculate. How much does he spend a year?"

"Upon my word, I don't know. He lives handsomely, but not extravagantly."

"And scarcely ever travels. I calculate his expenses, then, at twelve thousand francs or less. When he is at home in the country, he has only his clothes to buy. The land keeps the master, the servants, and the horses. There would then remain eighteen thousand francs' savings every year. Do you know how much time is required to double capital when the interest is undisturbed?"

"No, I don't. I have not the slightest idea."

"What did you learn, then, at college? I knew that before I left my first school. Well, then, it takes fourteen years, and no longer."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Savinien.

"It is as I have the honour of informing you. Eighteen thousand francs at the end of thirty years give seventy-two thousand francs. And this pretty little sum having been renewed every year during the same lapse of time, your uncle must own twelve to fifteen hundred thousand francs at least."

"Don't tell me that. Your arithmetic makes my head giddy."

"My arithmetic is correct. I am sure that if Montauron told you the truth about the money invested by Baron de Trémorin in the Provincial Bank you would see that I am not far from the facts. Your uncle would, however, have double that amount if he had given his funds to an intelligent man, an active one, like myself, to turn over,"

"No doubt, but——"

"Oh, I do not say that in order that you should induce him to reinvest his cash in that way. My own affairs are enough for me. But do you know, I think his daughter must be a pretty good match."

"Yes, even without the fortune you attribute to her. She has attractions enough without a dowry."

"Granted. It is understood that you are going to marry her, is it not?"

"Understood is not the word. The marriage has been talked of, and will possibly take place. I admit that I wish it."

"You are right, perhaps—although I think that you would find a better match in Paris."

"I! you forget that I have only six thousand francs a year, and have made no sort of investment in the whole course of my life."

"Your uncle must have invested for you. He is your guardian, if I am not mistaken."

"Yes, I was only twelve years old when I had the misfortune to lose my father."

"Then Baron de Trémorin has managed your affairs for nine years, and your education never cost six thousand francs a year. Did he give you any account of his guardianship when you came of age?"

"He offered to do so, but I did not desire it. Business bores me, and he has consented to manage everything for me."

"So that, if to-morrow or any day you needed a hundred louis, you would be obliged to ask them of him, like some schoolboy going to get money to buy buns?"

"But I hope never to need as much, or even a less amount. I make no calculation for unexpected expenses."

"You talk like a boy, as you are, but you will soon change your tone. I will undertake to teach you music of another sort, and, as I don't wish to have your uncle finding fault with me, I will make you pocket some money this very day."

"Much obliged," quickly responded Savinien; "I don't wish to risk losing any, and if, as I presume, you allude to stock operations——"

"What do you take me for, you great simpleton? Do you think that I would let you into anything that wasn't sure and safe? There, now! here is the very thing! Do you see that tall man coming towards us?"

"The one with a decoration in his buttonhole?"

"Yes, my friend! At twenty-seven, it is very agreeable to be decorated like that, especially when one isn't a military man. Now, let me speak to him for three seconds, and after that I shall know whether I may plunge in."

With these words George Fougeray rose up, extended his hand to the new-comer, and greeted him with a smile. He took him aside, under an orange tree set in a tub, two paces away, and they began talking in a low tone.

Savinien, who had finished eating his truffled eggs, poured out a final glass of Grave to while the time away, and furtively examined the young man whom his friend George had greeted with so much eagerness. He was fair, rather good-looking, and not badly built. He was dressed, too, with extreme elegance, and might, at a first glance, have been taken for a man belonging to good society; but, on looking at him a second time, Savinien found his face very unpleasing and his eyes false, without

mentioning that there was a certain awkwardness in his gestures, those of a man too suddenly grown rich.

"He looks like a valet who has made a fortune," thought Viscount d'Amaulis. "How can George care to talk to such a lout?"

The talking did not last long. The gentleman went off without bowing to his companion, and Savinien caught the last words which he uttered: "Go on boldly, and hold on strongly. You shall be backed."

"Be sure about that," answered George. "My tongue isn't in my pocket. Tell the governor that he may rely on me."

Savinien observed that the people seated at the tables near by followed the fair-complexioned young man with their eyes, as he went off with a swagger. Petty clerks, standing behind men who were breakfasting, to take Exchange orders, nudged one another and whispered together as they pointed him out.

"The affair is set going," said George, taking his seat again. "Have some coffee and light your cigar. You can finish it under the colonnade. Moments are golden to-day."

"Who is this gentleman whom every one stared at, and who came expressly to talk to you? A broker?"

"Better than that, my friend. He is the confidant and friend of a man who sets stock rising or falling as he pleases."

"Monsieur de Rothschild, I presume."

"The baron, whom I highly respect, hasn't that power. A man must hold the frying-pan by the handle to be in the way of influencing the market."

"The frying-pan by the handle!" exclaimed Savinien, quite taken aback.

"In other words, one must belong to the Government."

"Is that young fellow in such a position? Is that what you mean?"

"He—he's not such a fool! He is satisfied with executing the commissions given him in high quarters. That is much safer."

"Then, is it because he executes commissions so well that he has been decorated?" asked Savinien, rather ironically.

"You have guessed it," exclaimed George with a laugh, "unless, indeed, he has rendered other services of which I am ignorant. At any rate, they were not in the army. People like Rheinthal don't go into foolish professions."

"What! do you call it foolish to be a soldier?"

"Glorious, but stupid. Such is my opinion."

"It isn't mine," quickly replied the last of the Amaulis; "I assure you that if my uncle hadn't opposed it I should have entered the military school of Saint Cyr. The army was always the choice of members of my family."

"You wouldn't have been engaged to Mademoiselle de Trémorin in that case, for a man cannot with propriety be married till he is a captain at the least, and it would have taken you twelve years to become one. Your cousin wouldn't have waited for you, so you need not regret your epaulets. Before to-night I shall have clearly demonstrated to you that: 'A great man's friendship is a gift from heaven.'"

"I don't understand your quotation in the least."

"You will understand it by and by. Are you ready? Waiter, the bill!"

"Yes, before he brings it, I shall have finished," said Savinien. "What

strange faces one sees here ! All these gentlemen breakfasting in this room, and the young fellows swarming about them like flies, have the same faces, black eyes, curly hair, thick lips, and noses like parrots' beaks. One would think it was Judea."

"So it is," replied George, laughing. "You know that if all financiers are not Israelites, all Israelites are financiers."

"It runs in the blood. Their ancestors adored the Golden Calf. I dreamed of it last night. It was no doubt caused by your promise to take me on 'Change to-day. Fancy that after I left you this morning I fell asleep in an arm-chair and had the most singular vision, and, besides, an adventure still more extraordinary——"

"You shall tell me all about it at dinner to-night, my dear friend. We have not a moment left to set to work."

"Set to work ?" repeated Savinien.

"Yes, my dear fellow. And you shall see how I work. You don't understand anything about it as yet, but you will presently observe that it is a fatiguing but lucrative exercise. The bill is paid, so let us be off."

And without taking the louis which Savinien held out for his own share of the breakfast, Fougeray rose and walked rapidly away. The viscount, who followed, was not a little surprised to see that several of the men with hooked noses accosted George. They had evidently laid in wait for him and taken pains to put themselves in his way. However, Fougeray, without deigning to stop, got rid of them by a gesture which signified : "I don't know anything, or if I do I'm not going to tell it."

Savinien, who overtook him at the door of the restaurant, heard him say to one man more persevering than the rest : "I am not in the secrets of the gods, my good sir. I really wasn't present at the ministerial Council this morning."

"But Rheinthal must have——" began an importunate fellow.

"Rheinthal says that stock is down, and I think so myself."

With this answer, made in a tone of authority, George took his friend's arm, so as to curtail all further inquisitiveness.

"They appear to take you for an oracle," remarked Savinien.

"An oracle at second hand, as it were. They saw me speak for five minutes to Rheinthal, who knows everything about political matters. In fact in one moment everybody on 'Change knew he had seen me. I'll wager that more than one operator will watch my movements. But I am more cunning than the whole lot of them, and by the time they find out what I am about I shall have accomplished my purpose."

"You are going to speculate to-day, then ?"

"That's a pretty question ! Do you suppose that I am going to pass my time in contemplating the frescoes on the ceiling of the Bourse."

Rather ashamed of his simplicity, the viscount said no more, and suffered himself to be led to the temple where Fortune, the antique divinity, was so ardently worshipped.

A loud clamour could be heard there, for the hour had come. The adoration of the blindfolded goddess was at its height, and it is always a noisy affair.

The faithful who had come late were climbing hastily up the steps in front of the edifice, and a crowd already encumbered the peristyle. Under the colonnades the throng was extremely dense, and inside a vast mob swayed to and fro.

A long line of carriages and cabs stood before the iron railing of the

courtyard ; other traps were coming up at every moment, and some fresh speculator or broker, who scarcely gave the vehicle time to stop before alighting, hurried at once into the building. The people swarmed together, ran about, and talked loudly.

"I have never been in Charenton Asylum," said Savinien to himself, "but I imagine that the maniacs in that establishment are not more noisy and extravagant of gesture than these people here. However, I trust that this kind of madness is not catching, and I am not sorry to have a glimpse of a spectacle of which I had no idea."

George did not allow him time for further reflection. "My dear friend," said he, as they walked briskly up the steps, "you are now on the field of battle ; the fight is about to begin. Don't leave me if you wish to be entertained ; but, no matter what I may say or do, keep discreetly silent. It will be the best for you. I may be obliged to introduce you to some jobbers who are acting on my behalf."

"I don't care to know them," interrupted Savinien.

"I shall merely mention your name. That won't compromise you, and may be of service to me. I will tell you why when the day is over."

"If my name can be of service to you, that alters the case. But——"

"I only ask one thing of you—say nothing. You will be taken for a capitalist making a first appearance on 'Change, and anxious to see how things go ; that is what I wish people to think."

"What I wish, for my part, is merely to look on. As for gambling——"

Fougeray did not notice this protest, however, for the middle of the flight of steps was hardly reached ere he was greeted by three clerks who had seen him arrive, and who rushed down to meet him. Savinien, who had dropped George's arm without leaving him, heard these hurried words : "Well, how about Rheintal ?"

"I have seen him at Champeaux'."

"It is already known up stairs. Little Kœnigstein left the restaurant expressly to spread the news."

"Good ! then the soil is ready ; we have only to work it. Act quickly. Sell three hundred thousand."

"What a start !"

"We are two," said George, glancing towards Savinien. "The three hundred thousand are for us. But everybody must go on. I have orders up to nine hundred thousand."

"Excellent ! What is the news you have ?"

"A threatening message from Prussia as regards the expedition to Tunis. That is the theme. Play upon it. How much was the opening ?"

"Eighty-two thirty-five." \*

"Well, when it is down to ninety-two, we will see. Go on, my lads. And don't keep your tongues in your pockets."

The clerks flew off like sparrows, and George again took Savinien's arm to ascend the remaining steps.

"Have we really any serious difficulties with Prussia !" asked the viscount.

"Very serious. War is perhaps at hand."

"The deuce ! If it broke out my stay in Paris would be shortened. I should have to join my regiment, and I shouldn't be sorry to do so."

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\* For the benefit of the unsophisticated reader it may be as well to mention that this means the opening quotation of French Three per Cent. Rentes on that particular day, —*Trans.*



"What an eager warrior! We haven't got so far as that yet. Be content, just now, with looking at the battle for money. You won't be wounded, I promise you, and you will see how amusing it is."

On reaching the colonnade, George turned to the left and went to post himself advantageously at the northern corner.

"Aren't you going in?" asked Savinien, who was still near him.

"Why should I? I have my place which everybody knows, and I can assure you that people will find me. Go in if you like. You will see a rough hustling. I warn you, however, that you will be sorely elbowed."

"Oh! I don't care to go in, and shall keep near you—unless I am in your way."

"You are not, if you don't keep too near. I shall be closely surrounded, and must be able to move freely."

"Be sure that I shall keep at a respectful distance from your person. I don't wish to be taken for a gambler in stock."

The occasion for retreating soon presented itself. Fougeray had no sooner installed himself in his accustomed place than he became the centre of a circle. His appearance attracted at least a dozen gentlemen, who knew him to be well informed. Savinien drew back a little, and fixed his eyes upon the trees, which were beginning to sprout above the sanded walk running round the building.

"What! here already, viscount?"

Savinien turned. Nothing could have surprised him more than to be spoken to by a speculator on 'Change, for he knew no one likely to be there. His astonishment diminished somewhat, however, when he found himself face to face with M. Bouret, who as a financier necessarily frequented the place.

"Yes, sir," replied the viscount with some embarrassment; "I came with my friend, George Fougeray, and I didn't expect to have the pleasure of seeing you here."

"I come seldom," replied the under-manager of the Provincial Bank; "but there are occasions when it is necessary to appear in person to watch over important interests. Your uncle—our shareholders, I should say—would think it strange if I did not appear on the ground on a day like this."

"I do not know how much truth there is in the rumours that are afloat—it is said that there will be war with Prussia."

"Yes, that hoax has been about since half past eleven. I know whence it came and don't think it will take. But it has set all our people going to such an extent that Montauron, who does not like to give himself any trouble, had to come here in person and plunge into the vortex. He is here now."

"I should be glad to profit by this chance of being introduced to him—the more as I am simply idling here—a mere spectator. I never entered the Bourse before."

"You will return; but I am very sorry that I cannot just now present you to our director. He wished to talk to our brokers himself, and he must now be in the centre of the hall, which it would be impossible to reach. A man must have ribs of iron not to be crushed in the crowd. I would willingly do all in my power for you, but I am expected at the Provincial Bank, and haven't a moment. I told Montauron of your coming this morning, and he expects an early visit from you. Excuse me if I leave you, viscount. Good-day, till I see you again! Ah!" resumed the busy

financier, suddenly retracing his steps, "one bit of advice. I don't know what your friend Fougerey argues from this beginning; but if you are going to operate, remember that there will be a rise towards the last."

"Oh! I am not going to speculate," promptly replied Savinien, resuming his wonted strain.

M. Bouret did not wait for his reply, however; in fact he had already gone. Savinien, without leaving his post, saw him cross the sidewalk and climb into an elegant victoria. The horse darted off like an arrow shot from a bow.

Meanwhile, George was talking in the centre of a group, to which newcomers were constantly added.

Savinien, faithful to his agreement, took care not to go too near, but he caught stray words, which were absolutely meaningless to him. The dialogues were brief, and the speakers talked so rapidly that they seemed to be making use of negro dialect, or the shortened words of telegraphic despatches. Sometimes, however, men came up all out of breath, and clearly articulated in French, and at the top of their voices, such news as the following: "The Prussian fleet is in the port of Kiel ready to sail."

"There is a very startling despatch. I have just seen some one who saw it."

"Stock is down as low as it can be."

"In five minutes it will be below eighty-two."

George smiled, said some word or made some sign, and the messenger returned to plunge again into the furnace, which was at full blast, to judge at least by the noise it made.

"It is strange," thought Viscount d'Amaulis, "that they should bring bad news and look pleased at it. If all this is true it will be bad for our country. I shall never understand all this, and it is quite useless for George to try to teach me."

Other men, less flurried, now passed with memorandum-books in their hands, and glanced at the speculators of their acquaintance, as they mentioned some figure in a dry tone, without comment, and quite certain as to being understood.

At first they paid no attention to Savinien. The face of the fair-haired young man leaning against the stone balustrade was unknown to them, and they had no time to lose. However, some who had seen him chatting familiarly with M. Bouret did not fail, when the capitalist went off, to stop for a second before Savinien, and announce the quotations, to which the young native of Brittany replied by a "Thank you," which threw them into speechless amazement. They were not, it was easy to see, used to these futile civilities.

"They take me for a gambler in stock, that is clear," thought Savinien. "I have a great mind to go away. Their opinion of me is simply humiliating. I cannot go off, however, without a word to George, who isn't thinking of me at all, just now, any more than of the most perfect stranger. If he doesn't come away from that crowd in fifteen minutes' time, I shall bow myself out. I don't find it amusing standing under this classic colonnade."

The reflections of Yvonne's cousin were at this moment interrupted by a person of somewhat mean appearance, who had been buzzing about him for some minutes, and who finally accosted him with—"That good Bouret thinks that everything will run up, and I think he's mistaken. What do you think?"

"I don't think anything at all," replied the viscount, eyeing this individual from head to foot, "and I am not called upon to tell you what Monsieur Bouret thinks, either."

"Oh, don't get into a rage! What I say is to prevent you from making a mistake; I never saw you here before, and I take an interest in new-comers."

Savinien was about to fly into a perfect passion, but George Fougeray came up suddenly, and pulling him by the sleeve, drew him into the circle round himself.

"Galipot, my dear fellow," said he, addressing a very fat, florid man, who had not left him for a moment since he had taken up his position, "here is the friend I spoke of, Viscount d'Amaulis, a landowner in Brittany."

"And the nephew of Baron de Trémorin, if I am not mistaken," said M. Galipot, in a hoarse voice.

"Monsieur de Trémorin is my uncle," said Savinien, with a frown; "and if you will tell me how my near relationship to him can possibly be of any interest to you——"

"No matter, that is enough," pantingly interrupted the corpulent individual.

At this Savinien fairly lost his self control. "Come, sir," cried he, "explain——"

"Be still!" interrupted George Fougeray, in an undertone. "After 'Change I will give you any explanations you wish, but I beg of you not to attempt to understand me now, and to say as little as possible while we are at work. Be quiet, if you have any regard for me! I am playing my ultimatum to-day."

"Then let me go. I don't like these people, and shall only do you harm without intending it."

"Go, then; I will soon join you at a place which I will point out to you. Do you see that confectioner's—over——"

Savinien waited for the conclusion of the sentence, but it did not come. George was no longer looking in the same direction. His eyes were directed towards the Rue de Richelieu, and his attention was concentrated upon an open carriage which had just turned the corner of the Rue de la Bourse.

"The signal," said he, between his teeth. "The deuce, it is too soon! Those people don't know what they are about!" Then turning round, and without paying any more attention to Savinien than if that useful friend had been far away at Plouër. "Where do you stand?" cried he, in a sharp, clear voice.

"Eighty-two offered," replied, in chorus, two or three clerks, emerging from the main hall.

"Now is the time," said George, in the ear of his faithful jobber; "set everybody going; every second is worth ten thousand at least."

"How much do we buy?" asked Galipot, curtly.

"Double the other amount."

"That is rather stiff. But I'll do it."

"All right. In five minutes the despatch will be posted up; we shall have a full hour to work the rise, and before half-an-hour it will be in full swing. But I'll help you. There's work for two!"

Galipot was already hurrying at full speed towards the entrance, like a ball set rolling. Fougeray rushed after him, saying to the viscount by

way of farewell : " At the confectioner's—over there—you know ! I shall be there at two-twenty, and you won't be sorry if you wait for me."

" The devil take him with his brokers and his pie-shops ! " muttered Savinien, stupefied. " Is he making fun of me, sending me to eat cakes while he plays the juggler with rise and fall ? I am going to take a cab and make my calls in the Rue de Varennes and the Rue de Grenelle Saint-Germain."

He was going toward the steps when he suddenly saw, at ten steps from him, a face which made him abruptly pause. It was that of a gentleman who came out of the hall just as George went in and who stopped near the door. He had with him a number of persons who formed a circle about him as he paused. Their eagerness testified to the financial status of this individual, who was talking with grave gestures and the decided manner of a man accustomed to be listened to with respect. The deference of those about him showed that his opinion had weight with less important speculators.

However, it was neither his manner nor his surroundings that interested Viscount d'Amaulsi. Savinien was that day pursued by resemblances, and he thought that, from a distance, this gentleman had the same figure and features as the persecutor of the veiled lady, as that jealous and angry husband, who at half-past eleven had still been watching for his wife in a by-street near the Rue du Helder.

" Ah ! soliloquised Savinien, " I thought that fellow was a moneyed man ; he looked and acted like one. He thought fit to quiet down when I mentioned my name ! That's exactly like some financier who does not want to quarrel, and who keeps his temper under all circumstances. Business habits make people careful. But I didn't think that he was one of the big men on 'Change. I must go nearer to him to make sure that he is really the door-breaker."

He drew near the group of people who were listening to the speaker, and so near that the latter saw him. There are changes of countenance which are unmistakable ; contractions of the muscles around the mouth, or a transient blush. But the financial magnate did not stir. He did not even interrupt the discourse which he was addressing to his disciples. However, he so placed himself as not to lose sight of the young native of Brittany, who was about to descend the first step of the main flight.

" He does not appear to be angry any longer," muttered the viscount. " He has probably determined to make the best of the matter. Husbands are very easy in Paris. This one's wife has convinced him that he was mistaken. He probably found her at home when he got there. She probably demonstrated that she had not been out of the house this morning, and he probably apologised. I shall certainly not disturb myself about this happy couple. But still I should like to know their name."

And he sought for some pleasant-looking man in the crowd near him, with a view of asking this name. Any number of those who were in the habit of coming to the Bourse must know it. But although there were plenty of people about, they were all too busy for any hope of reply. They did not keep still for a moment, and exchanged rapid words in the slang of the place as they passed along.

However, Savinien saw upon the flight, two or three steps below him, a young man who was making a cigarette, and whose face pleased him,

This incipient broker was of about the same age as the viscount, and looked only too ready to chat.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Savinien, politely raising his hat, "will you be kind enough to tell me the name of that gentleman who is talking away so fast—over there—in the midst of that group."

"With the red nose and English whiskers?"

"Yes."

"That is one of Bismarck's secretaries," replied the young man, with perfect gravity.

"What, sir?"

"He has been sent here by his employer who has bought stock at eighty-two ten, and wants to get rid of it."

Savinien saw that the smiling jester was making fun of him; he turned pale with anger, and was about to speak to him in quite another tone, when a young clerk came up in all haste and, catching the facetious individual by the waist, exclaimed: "What are you doing here? The governor is looking everywhere for you! There's a despatch! It has just been posted up! Come along, you lazy-bones! You have little time left. The prices are running up like mercury. They will be at eighty-three before the close!"

They both set off like pointers after a hare, and were already far off before Viscount d'Amaulis could think of any cutting thing to say in view of punishing the saucy fellow whom he had made the mistake of addressing. They were, indeed, so soon lost in the crowd that Savinien gave up the idea of following them.

"I must have a very countrified appearance to be treated with such impertinence by that scamp," said he, between his teeth. "I won't lose my time running after him, but if I come across him I will teach him manners. What a set, and how I pity George for being thrown into such society! I should never get used to it, and the best thing I can do is to take myself off. I should have been glad to find out the name of the lady's husband—but I give it up—the first attempt is enough. There he is still, he has even come near the steps, and seems to be watching me—this is the best time to be off, as I don't care about entering into any further explanation with him." With this wise resolution, Yvonne's cousin turned his back upon the swarm under the colonnade and descended the steps, thinking of all he had seen and heard.

He was still confused, and went away when the noise was at its height. There was a frightful clamour, and at each moment he was elbowed by people who looked as though they were besieging the place, so hurriedly did they rush up the steps. The words "Despatch!" "Poster!" "Rise!" buzzed in his ears, sometimes accompanied by energetic swearing.

There was evidently something strange going on. Some unforeseen news must have caused all this excitement. Seen from above, the flight of steps resembled an ant-hole into which a stick had been thrust to stir up the insects inside.

Savinien took no notice of the effect caused by the despatch which was noisily announced on all sides, but he thought of his friend who had thrown himself into the midst of the strife, and wondered how he would get out of it. George Fougeray had sufficient experience to navigate among the rocks on which so many speculators come to grief, but there are storms which overturn the best directed vessels, and the squall now brooding over 'Change was no doubt fraught with disaster.

Savinien thought that Fougeray was for "running down," and imagined he had caught alarming information on the wing. "The run is up!" had said the little clerk, before hastening off with the saucy young fellow whose absurd reply had so much annoyed him.

"Who knows whether this rise may not strip George of all he has made in five years?" said the viscount to himself. "I should be very sorry, for I like him very much, frivolous as he is. My uncle would judge him very harshly, but I think that he has remained good-hearted and honest in spite of the life he leads, and I should really be showing very little interest in him to abandon him just as he has plunged in up to the neck, as he says he has done. He asked me to wait for half an hour at the confectioner's at the corner. I may as well gratify him, and when I have heard what he has to tell, it will be time enough to call on my relatives in the aristocratic quarter of the city. But why did he choose this shop as a place of meeting? What an idea! I have just left table, and haven't the least wish to eat cake. Bah! I'll take a glass of port, and if George makes me wait too long, I will smoke a cigar outside the establishment, which, by the way, seems to have a good run of custom; there are four or five carriages in front of it now.

Savinien, who had now reached the bottom of the steps, turned round to take a last look at the building where his friend's fate was being decided, and again he saw in the doorway the raging husband, who seemed to be following him with his eyes.

Little did it matter, however, if this man were busying himself about him. Savinien shrugged his shoulders and went his way.

In the depths of his heart he was not only thinking of the danger to George. He had, besides, another anxiety which he did not exactly admit to himself, but which, nevertheless, preyed upon his mind. He remembered certain words which had fallen from his companion—certain changes in his manner when he was at his post under the colonnade, and he asked himself whether this young man, who seemed to be very reckless, had not followed up the idea which had come into his head at the restaurant; whether he had not allowed himself to associate his former schoolmate in his speculations, and that without due authorisation or even telling him of it.

"Why the deuce did he introduce me to that Monsieur Galipot, who looked like a jobber?" said Savinien to himself.

He crossed the street with considerable difficulty, for it was more crowded than ever, and on coming to the confectioner's shop pointed out by George he passed near two gentlemen who were leaving the establishment, and he heard one of them say to the other: "This shop is decidedly the Ladies' Exchange."

The gentlemen passed by, and Savinien, before going in, asked himself what they had meant by these words; though he knew that women were not admitted into the Bourse, and that the interdiction did not prevent them all from speculating in shares of all kinds "quoted" and "unquoted" in the official lists.

A woman of fashion can, without leaving her dressing-room, write to her broker to give him an order to sell or buy, using the same paper as serves her for her love-letters; and, indeed, this is done even by some women of the gay world. Some have speculated wisely, and can reason about "settlings" as clearly as old brokers.

There are also women living on little incomes, door-keepers' wives,

retired irregulars, who speculate with eagerness, but in a comparatively small way. These come as far as the rows of trees planted on either side of the edifice, which they have not the right to enter. They may be seen walking under the trees with bags in their hands, chatting with unlicensed brokers, and keeping up mysterious confabulations relating to the stock of some cab company or other.

Women of this class, however, would not dare to show their tawdry shawls in a shop before which, from two till five, so many elegant equipages are seen standing. One of those now drawn up outside was a large open landau with two superb bays, held in check by a coachman in a maroon and gold livery, who sat as solemn and stiff on his box as some judge of an appeal court, his whip resting on his left hip, and his eyes on his horses. Moreover, a footman dressed in the same colours as the coachman stood as motionless as a sentinel at the entrance of the confectionery shop. It was evident that the servants, horses, and carriage, were waiting for their master to drive to the Bois de Boulogne, unless, indeed, the absentee was their mistress.

Savinien had the curiosity to look at the panels, expecting to find a princely or at least a ducal escutcheon. He was not a little surprised, however, to see only some initials interwoven in so complicated a manner that he did not care to take the trouble to decipher them. He would probably have learned nothing by doing so, having too lately arrived in Paris to know the names of such wealthy families as do not figure in the French "Peerage."

"All this," thought he, shaking his head in a pensive manner, "must belong to some *parvenu* who has made millions in speculating. Such people are the most conspicuous now, and nothing is too handsome for them. As I have made up my mind to wait for Fougeray, I shall question him on the point, and he will tell me whom this turn-out belongs to." And in order to keep his promise and satisfy his curiosity, Viscount d'Amaulis then entered the much favoured shop.

It would be more correct to say that he squeezed himself into it, for it was so full that it was difficult to get in at all. There were only women inside, and a great many of them. All of them were not young; the middle-aged were even in the majority, but they were invariably stylish-looking, some even handsome, and others pretty. The dresses were all of an elegant description, and in such attire a Parisian woman always looks well, as she knows what is best suited to her own style.

It was very interesting to see these ladies besieging the counter, and with their delicately-gloved fingers pillaging the plates filled with strawberry tarts and sponge-cakes, impregnated with rum. At the end of the shop other groups had gathered in front of a buffet covered with cup-cakes, and a shelf-bracket of white marble, on which stood several large decanters of cut glass. These ladies chattered like jays, and dipped their rosy lips in topaz-hued sherry.

The subject was one for an artist such as those who excel in representing the grand-stand at Longchamp or the beach at Trouville, at the hour when the aristocracy is present.

Leaving aside a few private entertainments given by society at Dinan and St. Malo, the only gatherings of ladies that Savinien had previously witnessed had been those at Dinard during the bathing season, but nothing that he had so far beheld could compare with this basket of animated flowers, which fairly dazzled his eyes. He was neither awkward nor

timid, as a rule, and yet he felt ill at ease in the midst of this elegant throng.

Such groups suited him better than those upon the steps of the Bourse, but it seemed more difficult to mingle with them. It is true that he was the only person of his own sex in the shop, and that the ladies glanced at him in a manner anything but encouraging. They evidently considered him to be a foreigner from some distant spot, a new-comer who had, by chance, lost his way in a place not meant for him, or an indiscreet individual who had come there to spy upon them.

"This is strange," thought he; "most women like eating, but they don't like it so much as to pass their time in nibbling cakes, when it is such fine weather, and the trees in the Champs-Élysées are beginning to show their foliage. Can it be true that I have come upon the 'Ladies' Exchange,' as that gentleman remarked on coming out of here?"

To satisfy himself, he finally ventured to approach the counter, and asked for a seed-cake and a glass of port, which he began to drink slowly, as he glanced out of the corners of his eyes at the ladies around him.

He had no need to study them long to see by their style and manner that they were people of good breeding. Women who belong to the irregular class are in the habit of staring, and if any such had been there they would not have failed to notice a handsome young man who had a look of good blood about him, and also a pocketful of louis, so it might be conjectured. Now, the neighbours of Viscount d'Amaulis did not notice him at all. They had not ceased conversing together, and on listening to them, Savinien heard the sacred words, "taken," "wanted," "in demand," "quoted," "referred," "price current," again and again repeated.

There were even two of these ladies busy with gold and jewelled pencils jotting down figures in memorandum-books bound in ivory. Savinien's mind was made up. These women operated in buying and selling, like the speculators of the sterner sex who were shrieking like madmen under the colonnade. The discovery greatly saddened him.

"It is like my dream," said Yvonne's cousin to himself. "These ladies are worshipping the Golden Calf, and would dance without shame before its image if it were here."

He soon caught whole sentences of their conversation. "You are too late, countess; the stock isn't down any more. I have just seen Rheinthal pass. The trick is played. Everything will run up."

"I have been eleven minutes on the rise. Turning in time is the secret, my dear."

"Ah! you have hit it. I am sometimes obstinate. Last settling-day lost me fifteen hundred louis."

"Invite Rheinthal to your morning-receptions, baroness. No doubt his hair is sandy, and he is wanting in the first rudiments of politeness, but he knows what is going on."

And this countess, who so well understood when to turn in time, now rose and abruptly asked Savinien: "They were at eighty-two forty just now, I believe. Where are they at present?"

"I am absolutely ignorant of it, madame," replied the viscount to this question.

"You didn't come from Galipot, then?"

"No, madame. I am so unfortunate as not to be acquainted with Galipot."



"Ah! I was mistaken," quietly answered the lady, and she unceremoniously left the viscount to resume her conversation with her friends.

Savinien, vexed and humiliated at being taken for a jobber's clerk, carried his plate and glass farther off from the party.

He approached a group of less bold-mannered women, who were seated in a little parlour beyond, eating ices. These ladies were talking in a low tone, and their conversation appeared to be carried on in the manner customary in good society. They were not, however, seated at table for the pleasure of eating *Plombière* ices or a "granite-cream," for they often turned towards the door, and it was easy to see that they also were waiting for news from the battle-field in the main hall.

One alone was an exception. She did not look at the door, but at Savinien. Her eyes were fixed upon him—large black eyes they were, surrounded by a bluish shade, which must have resulted from other emotions than the commonplace ones of stock-gambling. She was at an age when women *consolidate* their beauty—when they do not become decidedly ugly. It was not her summer, nor was it yet her autumn. She was, at all events, unquestionably handsome.

"She is more than beautiful—she is sympathetic," said Savinien to himself; "but why does she look at me so persistently?" Now, Savinien knew very well that his appearance was not displeasing to women, but he was no coxcomb, and if the idea occurred to him that this lady liked his looks he did not allow himself to dwell upon it.

It must be said that she did not look like one of those insanely coquetish women who must needs be trying to make conquests on all occasions, and who, in bestowing their heart's affections, often trust to chance acquaintance. She was dressed with elegant simplicity, and had the reserved and almost haughty manners of a lady of high breeding. As soon as the eyes of the young viscount met hers, she turned away without affectation, and said a few insignificant words to a young woman with light hair seated near her.

But she had previously long examined Savinien, who, however, felt sure that he had never seen her before. He did as she did, ceased to look, and feigned to concentrate all his attention upon the seed-cake which he was crumbling in his plate. But he did not stop up his ears, and he heard the light-haired woman say: "I was greatly surprised at meeting you here, dear madame, as I know that you never speculate yourself."

"No, it doesn't interest me. My husband operates; that is quite enough," absently replied the lady whom the viscount had remarked more than any other there present.

"It is enough, perhaps," replied her companion, "but it is surely not too much; and you have no cause for complaint, as it is said that he never loses, and will make immense sums this month."

"After all," thought Savinien to himself, "this fine-mannered lady is only the wife of a broker. I took her for one of my own set! This morning I do nothing but make mistakes, and I greatly need George's experience. At Saint-Malo or Rennes I should not have made such an error of judgment. In the first place, every one is known there, and every one demeans himself according to his social standing. Women who keep shops don't imitate the wives of citizens, and the latter don't imitate duchesses. But my Parisian education is decidedly faulty."

"My husband won't run the risk of losing my fortune," added the blonde. "He is far too close to venture a thousand francs in speculation,

but he regularly finds fault with every article that I have to purchase, and whenever it is necessary to settle with my dressmaker or milliner we have frightful scenes. I brought him eight hundred thousand francs as dowry, not to mention my expectations; and he hadn't a copper to his name, but was completely ruined, when I did him the honour of marrying him. Ah! how fortunate you have been, madame, and how many would like to be in your place!"

"They would find out their mistake," murmured the black-eyed lady; "if they knew the life I lead they would be far from envying me."

"What! have you any reason to complain of your husband?" asked the blonde, with the malicious eagerness which women usually display when questioning each other as to domestic sorrows.

The other, instead of replying to this delicate question, indicated Savinien by a side glance. Seated where he was, he could not help hearing every word of this singular dialogue.

The blonde understood the gesture and immediately changed her theme.

"It seems to me that you have a new pair of horses," said she, looking through the shop window at the superb trotters standing outside. "Yes," answered the black-eyed lady, indifferently, "my husband made me a birthday present of them. But he uses them much oftener than I do, so that I am not called upon to be especially grateful for the gift."

"My brother," said the blonde, "met him yesterday in the Champs Elysées, all alone in your eight-spring carriage, and he told me that he had never seen finer horses or any more exactly matched. And as you are aware, my brother knows all about horses. His race bets have already brought him sixty thousand francs this year. How is it, dear madame, that you have not been seen at Longchamp once this year?"

"I have been out of health for a month past. My husband wants to take me to the Bois de Boulogne after Bourse hours; to-day will be my first appearance this season."

"Then you expect him here?"

"Yes, indeed, and I assure you that I would gladly dispense with the promised pleasure. I should have much preferred not to enter this shop. All these ladies, dabbling in business and eating Frontignan cheese, quite revolt me. Persons belonging to good society ought to be ashamed to show such a frenzied desire to make money."

"But it takes so much to live handsomely! Now-a-days, fifty thousand francs a year are nothing."

"But you, madame, have not taken to this sort of thing, like the little countess yonder who is doing her utmost to induce the fat baroness to buy I don't know what—a bad speculation most likely?"

"Oh no, I don't do anything without consulting a clerk from Galipot's office, who acts for me," answered the blonde, giddily. "He is an excellent young man, and knows all about such matters. He is quite delightful, and has never deceived me."

"I hope he never will," ironically replied the lady with the bluish circles round her eyes.

The other, undoubtedly vexed, did not reply to this answer full of double meaning, and nothing more was said.

Savinien had heard everything, and found the conversation very instructive. The lady waiting for her husband greatly interested him. The more he looked at her the more curious he became about her. Everything in her interested him—her fine eyes, her handsome features with

their expression of weariness, the atmosphere of tender melancholy surrounding her, her full harmonious voice, the sonorous sound of which awoke some confused recollection in his mind. He would have liked to know her, to beg her to confide her sorrows to him, to console and protect her, and without knowing why, he imagined that she would willingly have allowed him to defend her from those who persecuted her.

At this moment Savinien had forgotten his cousin. He was, without knowing it, feeling the ascendancy which women of an uncertain and often of a certain age always have over the young, the inexperienced, those who are new to life. Yvonne de Trémorin was not yet twenty, and this kind of attractiveness was not within her reach. However, Savinien had been careful to conceal the impression made upon him by the unknown lady. Indeed, he made no demonstration whatever, and, excepting a few somewhat prolonged glances, nothing evinced to any of the pastry-shop financiers that he noticed them. He finished his cake and emptied his glass. This was all he could undertake to swallow, and he did not care to give himself an indigestion for the sake of appearing at his ease. He glanced at the clock above the counter and saw that it was half-past two. George had promised to meet him at two-twenty. He was late, and Savinien had now a right to go off. He made ready to do so, and had even paid what he owed to a young person who was much more stylish in appearance than many of the most conspicuous ship-owners' daughters of Saint-Malo. But as, after all, he was in no great haste to depart, he began once more to examine the singular picture furnished by all these women grouped in every corner, and holding counsel together as gravely as the deputies who confer in the lobbies of the Chamber upon the most important political questions.

He naturally enough did not forget to glance once more at the beautiful stranger and the young blonde. They had not risen, indeed they were again chatting together, but Savinien now made a discovery which greatly startled him.

Directly behind these ladies, but in the street, there stood a man with his face close against the shop window, and Savinien recognised him immediately as the individual whom he had met at the door of the Bourse, the jealous husband who, in the morning, had besieged his door.

"This fellow is following me, it seems," said Savinien, biting his lips. "I find him at my heels at every step. He saw me from up there when I entered this pastry-cook's shop, and left his gambling to join me. This looks like persecution, and it is time to put a stop to it by asking him what his purpose is."

With this laudable intention Viscount d'Amaulis directed his steps towards the exit, but at the same moment the husband abandoned his post and slowly entered the shop. Savinien, who expected to be accosted by him, made ready to receive him angrily, but the singular individual did not appear to notice him. He passed so near him as almost to brush his sleeve, and went straight towards the two ladies who were conversing in the little parlour.

The blonde shook hands with him in English fashion, while the other lady rose and carelessly accepted his proffered arm. "Good-by, dear madame," said she to the fair-haired woman, "excuse me if I leave you. I see from my husband's face that he is in a dreadful hurry, as usual."

"Her husband!" muttered Savinien, much amazed. "Then it is the veiled lady who left her casket in my hands! I now understand why

this gentleman took up his post on the pavement to watch his wife through the window. He came up stealthily to see whether we appeared to know each other. He thought, no doubt, that he should catch us having a sentimental chat. Yes, that must be it, there isn't the slightest doubt."

The husband, whose conduct Savinien was mentally commenting upon, passed him on the way out as he had already done on entering, and without giving him a single glance.

"It seems to me that he goes off very well pleased," muttered Savinien. "What a lucky thing that I went no nearer! If he had perceived me approaching his wife he would have entertained no doubt but what it was she who was hidden in my apartment this morning. But he saw, on the contrary, that I took no more notice of the lady than she of me. So now he is convinced that I have no acquaintance whatever with her. How fortunate it is, that I did not remember her voice or figure; for had I done so, I could not have restrained myself from speaking to her, and then we should have been caught! What very steady nerves she must have had not to change countenance on seeing me! She recognised me, however, and that is why she looked at me so persistently. But she neither started nor turned pale. She went on talking with that light-haired, hare-brained woman, and sipping her Roman punch. What coolness! I'm not surprised that she should have deceived her husband. It is easy to see that she is used to dangerous situations. She is decidedly a great lady, 'a very great lady,' as they say in that piece 'La Tour de Nesle,' which made me laugh so heartily when I saw it played at Rennes by a strolling company. There is nothing like a woman belonging to society to be perfectly cool under all circumstances. She is, of course, a *financial* great lady, as her husband is of so much account on 'Change; but the financial ones are as cool as any others on such occasions. Just fancy my not knowing her name! If I dared, I might ask it of that pretty woman with the flaxen hair who was chattering with her just now. She is as talkative as a magpie, and if I set about it dexterously she would tell me."

There is no knowing what Savinien might have done had he been left to his inspiration; but at this moment his soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of George Fougeray, who rushed into the shop and almost into the arms of his friend, the latter having walked to the entrance to watch the strange couple.

Fougeray was radiant, and his first words were:—"Victory along the whole line, my dear fellow! There is my year before me, and the best things imaginable! I will furnish my place in good style, and as for you——"

"I have nothing to do with it," interrupted Savinien, taking George by the arm to oblige him to turn round.

"What the mischief ails you? What is the matter?" cried Fougeray.

"Do you know that gentleman in the vehicle there with that lady?" asked Savinien. "There, getting in now?"

"Vehicle! one would think that you were talking about a cab. That is an 'eight-spring' landau, and there's not another in Paris like it."

"I dare say, but I should like to know who owns it."

"You do know. You have talked of nobody else since you came to Paris."

"What!"

"That marvellous landau belongs to the illustrious Montauron, director of the Provincial Bank, banker-in-ordinary to his Excellency

Baron de Trémorin, and for the time being to Viscount Savinien d'Amaulis."

"And that is Monsieur Montauron getting into it now?"

"Yes. He doesn't lend his carriages to his friends, or his money either."

"Then the lady beside him is his wife?"

"Certainly. Montauron is too proper to drive about with a mistress in broad daylight. Besides he doesn't like 'irregulars.' The majestic person whom he is now taking to the Bois de Boulogne deigned to marry him a dozen years ago, although she came of a family as noble as your own. It is true that they were all poor on her side and Montauron was already wealthy. He is even much wealthier now. He is a daring, far-seeing man, with the luck of the fiend himself. Why, just now, he knew that an official announcement contradicting all the rumours about war would reach the Bourse at two o'clock and he manœuvred accordingly. He fished in troubled waters, and fished to good account. He must have raked in a million at least. He can afford to pay for eight-spring turn-outs, and his wife made a good thing of it when she exchanged the name of her ancestors for the plebeian but well-gilded cognomen of the lucky Montauron."

"What was her name before her marriage?"

"You ask me too much. I once knew, but I have forgotten it. She will tell it you herself when you see her, for I suppose that Montauron will introduce you when you call on him."

"I shan't call," hastily replied Savinien.

"What stuff! Why not? Your uncle urged you to do so."

"Yes—but—I have seen Monsieur Bouret, the under-manager of the bank."

"And that suffices. I can understand that such people are not very entertaining—besides, you can do without them now, unless, indeed, you have fallen in love with Madame Montauron," added George with a laugh.

"What an idea!" cried the viscount.

"She is thirty-two or perhaps thirty five, but she is charming, indeed a very agreeable woman. I will charitably add that she passes for being faithful to her husband, although he hasn't any of the attractions for which she cares. But don't let us remain here talking, for I have interesting news to communicate to you elsewhere than among the lady gamblers in this shop. Come with me to the boulevard. After that you can go to see the dowagers who are waiting for you in the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

Savinien suffered himself to be led away. He was completely upset by the strange discovery which he had just made, and since he had learned that the lady with the casket was the wife of M. Montauron he could think of nothing else. The consequences of his adventure appeared to him all at once. He could already see the husband watching his movements, and the wife coming some fine day to claim of him the casket which, by a most unlucky impulse, he had deposited in the vaults of the establishment directed by M. Montauron himself, banker for uncle Trémorin, and perhaps something more.

And, as an additional mischance, he was debarred from consulting George Fougeray on this delicate matter. When Savinien had set out in the morning he had resolved to tell his friend everything, but then he did not know the name of the lady concerned, and no one would have been compromised.

Now the case was not the same. To tell Fougeray, one of the best known men about town, that Madame Montauron had very nearly been caught by her husband while paying a clandestine visit to a foreigner at a hotel, this would surely be unworthy of a gentleman.

Savinien already reproached himself with having said too much in the presence of George, who was remarkably quick-witted, and guessed almost everything at once.

However, George was not at this moment thinking of the Montaurons. He was full of his success, and in the highest spirits, and as soon as he left the shop, he began telling the story of his lofty deeds. "My dear boy," he commenced "prepare to hear the most astounding things, and, though you are a cool-headed native of Brittany, don't swoon with joy. Do you know how much we have made?"

"We? I told you that I wouldn't speculate."

"I know it, my dear Savinien, and I have speculated for you, and even without your permission, so you have nothing to reproach yourself with."

"What does all this mean?"

"I am in earnest. I never joke about money matters. Since this morning we have sold three hundred thousand francs' worth of Rente three per cent., at the rate of eighty-two thirty-five, and bought it back at eighty-two."

"If you imagine that I understand one word of all this jargon, you are mistaken."

"There is no necessity for understanding. Your rural intelligence, however, must see the difference. Our profit is thirty-five. But that isn't all. We then bought at the same rate a nice lot of stock which——"

"I don't know what the 'difference' means, and I don't wish to know, but I do know that if I had lost any large sum, I couldn't have paid it. So I have no right to share in the benefits of your operation. It wouldn't be honest, as I risked nothing, though you, who are rich, might have borne a loss."

"Without you, my dear friend, I couldn't have operated on three hundred thousand. I used your name and your credit."

"My credit? You are crazy! It is only six thousand francs."

"Savinien, you distress me!" said George seriously, letting fall his companion's arm. "But I see Galipot coming towards us, and I imagine that you don't care to meet that gentleman, and have another interview."

"Oh, no!" cried Viscount d'Amaulis.

"Well, then, let us separate. I will see you this evening, and explain what you now refuse to hear. Till we meet again, you incipient millionaire!"

"He is certainly mad," muttered Savinien, seeing his friend run towards M. Galipot, "and I should become a lunatic if I stayed all day with him. I will go to see my old cousins, they will serve as a shower-bath to calm me."

### III.

"DAYS follow and are not alike" is an old saying which might be applied to nights, especially to those spent by a young man who has just left his province and plunged for the first time into the whirlpool of Parisian life.

After a stormy afternoon Viscount d'Amaulis had a quiet evening. Leaving George Fougeray at the Bourse he walked towards the Faubourg

Saint-Germain, and had hardly crossed the Pont des Saints Pères ere he became calm.

The breeze on the left bank of the Seine had a quieting effect on his mind; it but faintly echoed the turmoil of the boulevards, and Savinien found that, as soon as he reached the opposite side of the water, he was no longer the same.

He thought of the peaceful manor of Plouër and those who lived there; the sweet face of his dear cousin appeared to him, but not as in that dream, weeping at the foot of Mount Sinai. No, she now smiled upon him, and shook her finger at him to reproach him for failing to write to her. He vowed that he would go home early, and, by a long letter, redeem his promise.

The two relatives whom he was going to see were but distant connections. One was related to the Trémorins and the other to the Amaulis: however, both welcomed him with open arms, although he had barely presented himself at their residences during his former visits to Paris.

The Viscountess de Loudinières, who was a Trémorin, now told him that she wished to marry him to one of five or six heiresses among her list of acquaintances who were looking for young husbands of old family. In vain did Savinien declare that he had not come to Paris to marry; he was obliged to consent to be introduced to the noble relatives of these young ladies.

He then called on the Marchioness de Laffemas, whose great-great-grandmother had been an Amaulis. She at once sent for her son, who was at the moment examining a horse, and this sporting character, who looked like an English groom, deigned to invite Savinien to take a seat on his mail at the coming Longchamp races.

The two visits, to tell the truth, were not very enlivening to our gentleman from Brittany, but they quieted him down to the point that he forgot what a different kind of Paris was to be found at a few paces from the Rue de Varennes. In these aristocratic quarters the existence of a "Ladies' Exchange" was not suspected, and George Fougeray would have cut no figure there, although he was not easily abashed.

Savinien found the young speculator's society much more entertaining than that of the dowagers, or the presumptive heir of the Marchioness de Laffemas, but he did not care to see him again that day. He feared George might wish to make him join some gay party, and he was tired of enjoying himself, and wished to rest from past excitement and fatigue. He especially wished to avoid any financial explanation with the over-enterprising friend who had used his name to speculate in the public funds, and he hoped that, after that night's reflections, George would not insist upon sharing the profits of his risky operations with him.

The prudent viscount, therefore, decided not to return immediately to the livelier part of the city, where Fougeray, the gayest of men, resided. He went for a stroll in the Luxembourg Garden, where the chestnut trees were in early bloom; he sauntered along the new boulevard, which has transformed the old "Pays Latin," and, after crossing the Jardin des Plantes, he took the penny boat down the Seine. This was just the way that country people and English tourists spend a day in Paris. The only thing wanting was to visit the tomb of Napoleon under the dome of the Invalides.

However, this journey to peaceful places altogether quieted Savinien's mind. Seeing trees and flowers, he began to love nature once more, and to

regret the woods and heaths of Brittany. He began to ask himself whether he ought not to return at once to Plouër without entering any further into Parisian life. It would be the shortest way out of the stock-gambling matter. Uncle Trémorin would no doubt find fault with him for escaping from the exacted test, but Yvonne would quiet her father, and his own unexpected return would make her so happy !

Paris, like a certain subterranean locality, is paved with good intentions, and on that evening Savinien's intentions were excellent. He dined virtuously at a respectable restaurant in the Rue de l'Université, where his uncle had taken him on former occasions during their last visit ; he went to smoke a cigar or two under the colonnade of the Palais Royal, where he was sure of not meeting George, and this was all.

At ten o'clock he was in bed, and a few moments later asleep, still having, however, on his conscience that unwritten letter to Plouër.

He did not wake up till the clock had run its round, and the first thing he saw when he opened his eyes were some letters which a servant had placed on the pedestal while he was asleep. There were three of them, and on the envelope of the first that he took up he recognised the writing of Baron de Trémorin—large and firm, with down strokes like the masts of a ship.

"The deuce !" muttered Savinien, "my uncle has not waited for me to write. I am afraid that he will sarcastically congratulate me on my great haste in doing so. I have not yet penned a line during the forty-eight hours I have been here. It is shameful, and I deserve to be found fault with."

However, it was necessary to open the threatening letter, and having done so he read as follows :—

"Nephew, you are not exact, and this is a very bad fault. The postman came this morning with empty hands, and your cousin, who had gone to watch for him on the road, was so vexed that on her way back to the château she lost my newspapers in the avenue. I was obliged to breakfast without the *Gazette de France*, and without this appetiser to which I am so accustomed, I found myself unable to eat. For this reason I send you my malediction, and that of my daughter, who has lost three pounds in weight since you left. This preamble means, my dear boy, that we are anxious about you. Your aunt maintains that you must be ill. Yvonne says nothing, but she is not pleased. I think that you ought to have written at once to let us know about your arrival ; but I will excuse you, as I look for a long letter to-morrow."

"To-morrow ! that is to-day !" muttered Savinien, sadly. "Heaven knows what they will think when they get no letter ! My uncle is capable of coming here without a word of warning. Well, I shouldn't be sorry ; and if he takes me back to Plouër I shall be glad. But let me see what else he says," resumed Savinien, taking up the letter again.

"I can well understand that you must be very weary after a night spent in a railway train, and I should not have written had I not forgotten one matter which is of special importance among those which I spoke to you of. Montauron, the banker to whom I recommended you, is married, and when you go to see him, if you have not already called on him by the time this letter reaches you, do not fail to be introduced to his wife. She is of a very good family—much better than his own, which is of low birth. She has an excellent footing in Parisian society, and as she is no longer young, she can, without impropriety, be your guide in the circle she moves



in, which is such as I wish you to enter. Now that I have told you all this, and sufficiently lectured you, I need only embrace you, my dear boy, for myself and the two others, who talk of nothing but you from morning till night." This letter was signed—"Your affectionate uncle, Guy de Trémorin," and below the signature there ran a postscript: "Don't go beyond your letter of credit, but don't live closely. I did not send you to Paris to economise. You will have plenty of time to do that when you have settled down at Plouër."

Yvonne had written nothing, but Savinien found a little yellow flower in the letter which seemed as though it must have been culled by her from a tuft of wild furze which grew beneath her window at the foot of the old manor wall. Her cousin was touched by this souvenir, but he would have been more pleased had it not been for the strange and unexpected instructions of his uncle as regarded Madame Montauron. Baron de Trémorin spoke of this woman as if he knew her well; but such could hardly be the case, for had he been aware how she was conducting herself he would have been far from recommending his nephew to place himself under her care.

"Where the mischief can they have met?" Savinien asked himself. "I remember very well that yesterday she said she heard my name for the first time, and I flung it in her husband's face while she was hiding in my room. And now my uncle wishes that I should be introduced into society by her. He makes a pretty choice, indeed! Monsieur Montauron would have to consent to it, in the first place, and I don't suppose he is disposed to open his doors to me now."

As the viscount uttered these words he carelessly took up one of the other letters lying on the pedestal. "Ah, this surpasses everything else!" he cried, as he glanced at it. "The husband invites me to spend the evening with him! What can it mean?" And Savinien read aloud an invitation couched in the following terms:—"Monsieur Charles Montauron begs Viscount d'Amaulis to do him the honour of spending the evening with him on Friday, May 6th, and is at home on every Friday as a rule."

"My name in full," said Savinien. "Yes, this letter is really addressed to me. But come, how is it possible? Is it a trap laid for me, or were Monsieur Montauron's suspicions removed by our meeting at the pie-shop? A trap! no! that's absurd! A man in this banker's position doesn't invite people to his house to ensnare them, I am more disposed to believe that he wishes to see me in presence of his wife so as to observe our manner towards one another. And, on the other hand, it is he, and not his wife, who invites me. It seems as though it were a gentlemen's reception. 'Friday and the following Fridays.' He has his 'days' like a prime minister. However, whether his wife appears or not at these entertainments the question is—shall I go?"

Savinien now plunged into a sea of conjecture. He asked himself whether Madame Montauron would be better pleased if he rejected her husband's invitation. Since he had seen her face he had become interested in her, and he was of all things desirous of avoiding anything that might do her harm. He did not believe that she was immaculate, but did not wish to be the first to blame her. Her eyes seemed to ask pardon for her transgressions, and Viscount d'Amaulis was too young not to be moved by two such lovely imploring eyes.

And besides, he no longer saw the scene in which he had, in spite of himself, played the part of protector in the same light. Appearances were undoubtedly against Madame Montauron. A woman who has nothing

to reproach herself with does not leave her home without her husband's knowledge to call upon a gentleman at a hotel. The fear she had shown of being seen proved that she was in fault. But, after all, nothing showed that the gentleman in question was her lover. The contrary, even, seemed more probable, as, instead of awaiting her visit, he had vanished early in the morning.

What could have occurred between them before this unfortunate visit? what tie bound Madame Montauron to a Swedish count, who only visited Paris as a passer-by? It was impossible to guess. There was evidently some secret which this foreigner of title possessed, some secret which placed the banker's wife in his power, and it doubtless related to her past life. She had perhaps come to entreat Count Aparanda to restore her some compromising letters. Whatever it might be, however, she had certainly succeeded in quieting her husband's anger, in persuading him to believe in her innocence, since they had gone to drive together in the Champs Elysées and the Bois de Boulogne.

And, such being the position of affairs, would it not be better for Savinien to appear at the reception? To refuse would, in a manner, be equivalent to confessing some sort of complicity with the lately suspected wife. And, on the other hand, there must at some time or other be an explanation between Savinien and M. Montauron, for the jealous husband knew whom he had spoken to since Viscount d'Amaulis had given his name, and the nephew of Baron de Trémorin could not be thought a stranger. If the financier had not appeared to recognise the young native of Brittany when he met him on 'Change, it was, no doubt, because the place was unsuited for a quiet explanation, and the shop where they afterwards met was equally objectionable. However, this explanation must be expected, and indeed it was rather Savinien's place to furnish it than M. Montauron's duty to ask for it. He was the younger man, and M. Montauron had reason to think himself the offended party.

"Yes," thought Yvonne's cousin, after a long pause, "I see what this invitation means. It is as though the banker said to me: 'I acted wrongly; my wife was not in your apartments, and I regret having given way to uncalled-for violence. I cannot, for reasons which you can guess, go to apologise to you at the hotel where this painful scene occurred; but I wish to show you that I harbour no resentment against you, and you will profit, I trust, by the opportunity which I offer you of putting an end to a false situation.' Yes, that is it. Monsieur Montauron behaves like a gentleman, and as he takes the first step, I am called upon to respond to his advances by some personal initiative; merely to accept his invitation is not enough. I intended to visit him before I knew there was any difficulty between himself and his wife; and now that I know of it, there is all the more reason why I should pay this visit at once. I have an excellent motive for doing so this very day. My uncle expressly enjoined upon me to call upon M. Montauron on my arrival, and in the letter I have just received he renews his request. I feel certain that I shall be received, for Monsieur Montauron must be more desirous even than I am for an interview at which we can freely talk about what took place yesterday morning. Why should I shrink from this interview? My line of conduct is clearly marked out, I must retain an expectant attitude, as it will not do for me to propound this difficult question. He will undoubtedly do so on his side, and then I will not pretend to be ignorant of subsequent matters. I will not conceal from him that after

our meeting at the pastry-cook's shop, where he went to meet his wife, I learned his name, and that I thought it best to see him in order to apologise for having received him rudely when I did not know who he was. I will, of course, add that I have not the honour of knowing Madame Montauron, and I shall only tell half a fib, as she has never spoken to me with her face uncovered. I shall even beg the favour of being introduced to her afterwards. But if I intend to do all this to-day, I have not a moment to lose," added the viscount, springing out of his bed.

In his hurry he forgot to open the third letter lying on the pedestal, and it was only when he had finished dressing that, in putting the two others into his pocket-book, he caught sight of this unopened missive. The address was in a writing unknown to him, and the envelope bore the Paris postmark.

"This is strange!" said Savinien to himself. "I only arrived here a couple of days ago, and people already experience the wish to open a correspondence with me. It appears that I have made new friends without knowing it."

When he looked at the letter, however, he changed his mind. It came from the office of a broker, and contained merely a printed formula, filled up by some clerk, and informing Viscount d'Amaulis that his orders had been executed on 'Change the day before. It very curtly indicated the rates at which three per cent. Rente had been sold, bought, and re-sold in his name. This notification made Savinien frown, for he had persuaded himself that he had remained outside of his friend Fougeray's operations. There could no longer be any doubt, however: George had used the name of Amaulis, and his own did not even appear on the notification.

"The deuce take him!" exclaimed the viscount; "I shall now be obliged to mix up in this share dabbling which I don't understand. I shall perhaps even have to see this broker, and who knows what I may have to do at his office? George declared yesterday that he had made money, that *we* had, so he stated it; but may I be hanged if I understand the meaning of all these figures—they may mean ruin or good fortune—it is all gibberish to me, and I will make that good-for-nothing George rid me this very day of the business, and attend to the settlement himself, if there is a settlement; for myself I shall never get used to the words they use on 'Change, nor the things they do there."

A trifle cooled by this outburst, Savinien thrust the letter into his pocket. He would not place it in his memorandum book in contact with the note in which his cousin Yvonne had slipped a flower.

After glancing at himself in the mirror, he went out, intending to call on the great financier, who for twenty-four hours had occupied so large a share of his thoughts, and have an interview with him. M. Bouret had told him that Montauron was always to be found at his residence in the Avenue Ruysdaël before the hour of noon. This was the proper time, then. After leaving word with the doorkeeper of the hotel as to when he should return, in case George Fougeray called to ask for him, Savinien hailed a victoria and drove to the Parc Monceau. He did not wish to alight from a public vehicle at the door of a man whose turn-outs were so splendid, and he was glad of an opportunity to examine his residence before entering it.

It was a perfect palace, or at least a royal château, with a courtyard in front and garden in the rear. What a courtyard and what a garden! A gilded railing, a marble pavement, and a superb entrance-gate; behind

the gorgeous edifice an immense park, full of old trees and with broad lawns. Savinien thought of the old manor of Plouër, with its gaping cracks in the stone work, and the kitchen garden behind it. But the comparison did not abash him; he was beginning to be used to the display made by financiers, and so he boldly rang the bell.

Savinien said to himself that, as Viscount d'Amaulis, he had a perfect right to enter the house of a prince of finance, and he was firmly resolved to see M. Montauron and settle matters with him. Now he no longer hesitated. He wished to be seen openly entering the house like a man who does not shrink from what he is about. He was, perhaps, remarked, for a face appeared for an instant between the curtains of one of the windows on the first floor, a face which vanished at once. Savinien guessed that it was that of the banker's wife, but he could not make sure on the point as the curtain was not stirred again. No one replied to the ringing; the courtyard remained deserted, and the entrance closed.

"Where are the liveried footmen whom I saw at the bank yesterday?" muttered the viscount: "one would think that this was the palace of the Sleeping Beauty."

At this moment a sharp noise made him turn his head, and he saw that a side door had opened, a small door in a wall near a kind of lodge which seemed to be that of the doorkeeper. He went towards it, thinking that the main entrance was probably only used for carriages, and he was received by a footman, in a dark livery, a sort of giant, resembling those men who in old times came from Switzerland to serve as doorkeepers in lordly mansions. This imposing personage, moreover, had the manners of olden times, and he was extremely polite. He raised his gold-laced cap, and made haste to take the card held out to him by Savinien.

"If you will step into the reception room, Monsieur le Vicomte," said he, "I will go and announce you to the baron."

The "baron" was apparently the director of the Provincial Bank.

"The deuce!" thought Yvonne's cousin, "I was not aware that Monsieur Montauron had a title. Neither Monsieur Bouret nor George told me that, and there is no sign of it on his note of invitation. Perhaps, after all, he is only a baron to his own people. All financiers have something or other strung on to their names."

A bell touched by the doorkeeper abruptly curtailed these countrified reflections, and a footman appeared at the entrance of a vestibule on the right-hand side. This footman took the viscount's card from the doorkeeper's hand, and introduced Savinien into a conservatory, which did duty as an anteroom, and which was full of flowers and tropical plants. It was like a forest in some new world, but a civilised forest, as there were comfortable seats at regular intervals. Through an immense sheet of glass one would see the garden of the house blending with the Parc Monceau, from which it was only separated by a low railing covered with foliage.

"This is wonderfully beautiful," muttered Savinien, as the servant went off to find his master. "This is what I call intelligent luxury. My uncle wouldn't give his weather-beaten manor for this glaringly new abode, but I think that my dear Yvonne would be happy in such a place. She likes verdure, and here there is plenty of it."

After a moment's waiting the footman reappeared, more respectful than ever. "The baron is in the garden," said he, "and requests Monsieur le Vicomte to have the kindness to join him there."

Savinien, somewhat surprised, followed the footman, who led him across

a large hall, also full of flowers, to a door which opened directly upon a sanded walk.

"Fancy my expecting a solemn interview in a gloomy private apartment!" thought the viscount. "This banker has his own way of doing things. But, indeed, this is charming, this reception in a park, as it were! I shall be more at ease under the shade of the trees when we come to our delicate explanation."

He was about to ask the man in livery in which direction to look for the owner of the domain, when he suddenly saw him emerge from among the trees. It was really the gentleman whom he had seen three times the day before, and on the first occasion under circumstances not to be forgotten.

His look and manner, however, were no longer the same, and he wore a morning coat, fancy trousers, and a straw hat. His regular features bore an expression of cheerful calmness. He was no longer the grave financier surrounded by the gamblers of the Bourse, still less the angry husband who had burst open the door of No. 19. This transformation seemed favourable to Savinien, who immediately assumed a pleasant look. He had but to cross the walk to meet M. Montauron; he took off his hat, bowing, but not too low, because of the very peculiar position in which he found himself with regard to this banker, a man much older than himself. His aunt Trémorin, a lady of the old school, had taught him the art of bowing.

M. Montauron was less ceremonious. Making a sign to Savinien to resume his hat, he said, politely: "I was expecting you, sir, and am delighted to see you."

"Good!" thought Savinien, "he doesn't call me 'viscount' at every moment, like Monsieur Bouret did yesterday, and is glad to see me. This is well; but why did he expect me to-day?"

"You will excuse me, I hope, for receiving you in the open air," said Montauron. "I am in the habit of strolling here in the morning, and as you live in the country, I presume that you do not object to that."

"Oh, not at all," exclaimed the young native of Brittany; "but it is I who ought to apologise. I arrived in Paris on the day before yesterday, and I ought to have called on you immediately, as I had a letter to hand you from my uncle——"

"I know its contents, and I am also aware that Monsieur de Trémorin is well. He wrote to me a couple of days ago to tell me of your intended trip to Paris. I can understand why you did not call here yesterday."

This remark, which seemed to bear upon the events of the day before, confused Savinien, but M. Montauron immediately resumed: "I understand it all the better, as you called at our banking-house, where you thought you would find me."

"Ah, Monsieur Bouret told you then——"

"He only told me that he had seen you and sent you the trifling sum which you desired. I met him on 'Change in the afternoon but I only had time for a few words."

"Fortunately, he knows nothing about the casket as yet," thought Savinien.

"However you are here," resumed the banker, "and since you do not object to walking, we will, if you like, take a turn round the garden. No one will disturb us, and you will no doubt agree with me that we need to have a talk together."

Savinien started. It was clear that the time had come for explana-

tions, and he was not sure of being able to emerge triumphantly from his trying position.

M. Montauron conducted him along a winding pathway under a vault of foliage, formed by far-spreading trees rising to the height of fifty feet from the ground. The spot would not have been ill-chosen for a duel without seconds, for it was completely hidden from all prying eyes.

The banker and the viscount walked on, side by side, slowly and in silence. Savinien did not care to be the first to refer to the subject which he foresaw would be discussed, and M. Montauron was undoubtedly trying to find words to begin. "Monsieur d'Amaulis," he said at last, "I respect and esteem your uncle too highly, and I am too much inclined to like you yourself, to resort to circumlocution in referring to the position in which I find myself as regards you. I know that I am speaking to a gentleman, and I feel no hesitation in saying that in what occurred yesterday morning the fault was entirely my own."

"I assure you, sir," replied Savinien, who felt pleased by these words, "that I have already forgotten what happened."

"I remember it, however," replied the banker, "and I owe it to myself to explain my conduct to you; I also owe it to my wife, who will presently receive you, and I must, moreover, justify her, for I have acted in a way that might lead you to think her a guilty woman."

"I thought that you had made a mistake, that is all," said Savinien quickly. "I could not think otherwise, there being no one with me, when you wished to enter my room by force."

"I was wrong, indeed. I have ascertained that I was deceived by a resemblance. I was walking along the Rue du Helder, when I saw from a distance a lady who looked to me like Madame Montauron entering a hotel. How could such an absurd idea have entered my mind? I cannot explain it! I became, as it were, crazed, and this is the less comprehensible, from the fact that Madame Montauron, during twelve years of married life, has never given me the shadow of a cause for jealousy."

Savinien drew a long breath. He began to think this husband a perfect George Dandin,\* and that he would end by embracing him.

"I don't know, sir," continued M. Montauron, "whether you made any inquiries about what took place after the highly regrettable scene which I had with you."

"No, sir, no!" replied Savinien, with embarrassment. "I thought it beneath me to talk with the people of the hotel about an adventure which concerned me so little, for at the time I did not have the honour of knowing you."

"True, you did not know who I was, unfortunately, for had you known my name the situation would have been very different. You would, I am sure, have invited me into your room, but, taking me for a perfect stranger, you could not yield to my threats. I should have made all haste to apologise, and there would have been an end of the matter. When you mentioned your name I was on the point of doing the same, as you had been mentioned to me by Monsieur de Trémorin, and I knew that I had a gentleman to deal with. But before a hotel-keeper and his servants I could not do so."

"It would have compromised you," interrupted Savinien, who was only too glad to find things as they were.

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\* The classical French type of a deluded husband.—*Trans.*

"It seemed so to me, and I remained silent," resumed the banker; "but it is fortunate that you made yourself known, for I immediately saw that I was wrong. You had just arrived in Paris, and had never seen Madame Montauron before. What acquaintance could you have with her? I was ashamed of my own conduct, and so I went away. To return to more rational thoughts, it was only necessary for me to be in a condition to reason. I said to myself that I had acted with unpardonable thoughtlessness, and that instead of running after a woman who vaguely resembled my wife, instead of watching her and waiting in the street for her to emerge from the house which she had entered, I should do better to return home. I had left Madame Montauron there, I found her there, and thus had the proof that my suspicions were senseless. I then asked myself how I could have entertained them, and I insist upon giving you this explanation of my temporary madness, in order that you may not take me for a rash fool.

"There are times in life," continued the banker, "when a man's head is full of fancies—you see that I mention all the 'extenuating circumstances' in my favour—and yesterday mine was in that state when I remarked this woman walking in front of me. Her figure and walk seemed familiar to me. I looked more attentively at her; she vanished at the entrance of a hotel. Why did I stop before that door, and why did I make up my mind to enter and cross the courtyard? I should find it difficult to answer a question that I have put to myself ten times already since this ridiculous affair. But something further occurred which made me lose my head. I was alone in the courtyard, and about to go off, when the woman whom I had already seen suddenly appeared at the foot of the staircase where I was standing."

"Does he think that he is telling me something I don't know already?" thought the viscount, who had quite recovered his coolness.

"This time," continued M. Montauron, "she appeared to me front ways, but with her face hidden by a thick veil. Some details of her dress caught my eye. As though all fashionable women did not dress very much alike! Besides, she carried what appeared to be a box in her hand."

"Oh! now he is coming nearer to the point!" said Savinien. "Perhaps he has heard of my visit to the vaults of the Provincial Bank."

"This circumstance ought to have satisfied me, as Madame Montauron is not in the habit of carrying parcels with her when she goes out walking. But, as I told you, I had lost my head. And besides, this woman, as though she wished to give cause for my absurd suspicions, turned round as soon as she saw me, and began to run up the staircase at full speed. I ran after her—I did not know what I was doing—and I could not see very clearly, but she seemed to me to turn into the passage with which your rooms communicated. You know the rest."

"I fully understand, now, why you knocked at my door," said the viscount, as if quite satisfied. "This hasty flight must have seemed very strange to you. But there were several doors in the passage."

"I might have knocked at any door, and if the poor creature whom I frightened so much fled to any of your neighbours' rooms she must have laughed at the ridiculous spectacle which I afforded her."

"If that neighbour had had any courage he would have made the affair his own," said Savinien, who, so relieved was his mind, was now laughing inwardly at the poor man who was confiding in him.

"I am glad that you were the person whom I had to deal with,"

eagerly added Montauron, "for I am sure that you will keep all this a secret. Fortunately, the hotel-keeper does not know me. Indeed no one, you see, knew who I was, and as travellers are birds of passage, the one upon whom that woman called will go away one of these days, and she will not return there any more. So that——"

"I think that he has gone already," said Savinien, heedlessly.

"Ah, you asked about him, then?" said M. Montauron, looking at the viscount, who made haste to repair his blunder.

"Yes, yes," replied d'Amaulis, forgetting that he had previously declared that he had made no inquiries, "I had the curiosity to ask the hotel-keeper, and he told me that the lady had called several times already to see a foreigner who lived on the fourth floor—a Spaniard, I believe. However, he had changed his room on the day before yesterday, and had taken one on my floor, at the end of the passage. His lady friend did not know that he had made the change, and went up to the fourth floor, knocked, and as he did not open, went down again, intending to ask the door-keeper about him——"

"And instead of going to him she fled at sight of me. Why?"

"The hotel-keeper thinks that you must resemble her husband, and that in her confusion she took you for him."

"It may be so. I took her for my wife."

"Then she came up and met a maid in the passage who recognised her, despite her veil, and told her where the gentleman was to be found. He must have been waiting for her, for his key was in the door. She went in, and no doubt barricaded herself inside."

"And I, meantime, besieged your door. Jealousy is really the most foolish of passions. I played an absurd part, and it might have been still worse. Imagine what might have happened if I had met with a rough sort of man! We should have come to blows—a duel would have followed. I shouldn't have cared about that; but in my position as a bank director, and chairman of various companies, I am called upon to avoid such things, and my standing would have been greatly affected by a scandal. Your uncle would have withdrawn his confidence from me," added M. Montauron with a smile.

"I am sure that he wouldn't. My uncle served in the navy, you know, and he is much given to excusing duelling."

"No matter; it is better that things should not have gone so far, especially as I was utterly in the wrong. You say that this foreigner has left?"

"Yes, sir, last evening. The lady remained with him all day. They stayed till night time, and towards eight o'clock he went out for a cab, had his luggage put into it, and got inside with his fair one; at least, so said the hotel-keeper."

Viscount d'Amaulis had plunged into the most outrageous misstatements, but with the best of intentions, and he had no reason to apprehend that his mendacity would be detected, as it was evident that M. Montauron would not expose himself to recognition by going to question the hotel-keeper or his servants.

While Savinien was furnishing all these particulars the credulous husband became more and more cheerful. At the outset his face had been somewhat gloomy, but the clouds now disappeared; his look expressed unmingled satisfaction, and the viscount thought that it showed gratitude as regarded himself. "The poor man believed in his wife's innocence."



said Savinien to himself, "but he still had a doubt. He has none now, and I have brought this about."

Savinien was right, for at the first turn in the shady walk M. Montauron suddenly stopped, seized hold of both of his hands, and said to him in the most cordial tones: "I know that I can rely upon your discretion, and am greatly obliged to you, for I am indebted to you for not having got into difficulties which might have seriously injured me. Believe that I am, and shall always be, entirely at your service. Monsieur de Trémorin honours me with his friendship; I ask for yours, and offer you mine."

"I accept with all my heart," cried Viscount d'Amaulis, who mentally reproached himself for stimulating the conjugal illusions of the worthy man, and wished to be agreeable to him.

"Let us speak of yourself now, my dear sir," resumed the banker. "Your uncle wrote to me that you would spend six months in Paris. I need not tell you that my house is open to you, but I should be glad if your stay here had further results than that of merely meeting entertaining people. May I tell you that as soon as I heard of your expected arrival I laid a plan which will perhaps surprise you, but which I am about to submit to you. I thought that I—but you will, no doubt, think that I am meddling with what does not concern me—I thought that I might find a wife for you."

"A wife!" exclaimed Savinien; "I assure you that I don't want one, sir."

"Of course not!" replied M. Montauron, laughing; "at your age no one does, and it was not to settle down that you came to Paris. I understand that, and am not surprised that you wish to enjoy your liberty during your stay in a city where there is so wide a field for enjoyment, nor do I wish to thrust my advice upon you, or ask you to share my views; but I may ask you whether you would object to being introduced to a charming young girl who would, I hope, please you, and whom I am sure that you would please."

"Certainly not, but——"

"I will add that she is an orphan, and will bring a superb dowry to her husband—five millions at least."

"There is not another word to be said. I don't possess the fifth of a million, so the disproportion would be too great."

"Allow me to say that you don't yet know Parisian society. It is divided into two distinct sets—the one with money, the other with birth, and they tend to amalgamation. You are, no doubt, aware of it, as it is nothing new."

"I, certainly, am aware that such was already the custom in olden times, and still more often so now-a-days; but I have not the slightest inclination for the arrangements that are usually made. It is not that I lack progressive views, if such be the term to use in this case, but simply because I do not wish to marry a woman richer than myself."

"You are right in principle, my dear sir; but everything depends upon circumstances. To give the title of viscountess to a young lady whom one scarcely knows and does not love, in exchange for her wealth, would be a mere bargain, and I understand that such a transaction would be repugnant to your feelings of delicacy. However, if you feel deeply in love with a rich heiress, and she with you, her wealth would not stand in the way; your marriage would be a love-match. In such a case the

fortune would be a mere accessory ; and, let me add, the daughters of some of our men of money are well worthy of being courted for their own sake, and can dispense with the charms of their wealth."

"Certainly," muttered Savinien, who began to be embarrassed by the banker's persistence. He did not wish to abruptly declare that his heart was not his own, and that Yvonne de Trémorin was his affianced bride.

"However," resumed M. Montauron, laughing, "I must be tiring you with my theories as to the system of compensation, and if I continued talking to you as to the intermarrying of different classes, I should go quite beyond my purpose. You will soon see the young lady whom I intended for you ; for you will, I trust, do me the favour of spending next Friday evening with us. You will see her, I repeat, and you are quite at liberty to take no notice of her if she does not please you. Let us now speak, if you are willing, about your uncle. He writes to me that he shall probably make up his mind to spend a few days in Paris during the summer. This is good news. We are really friends, and I am much indebted to him, for he had a great deal to do with my marriage, which took place some years ago."

Savinien had some difficulty in repressing a smile ; he thought to himself that his uncle had done the banker but a sorry service in marrying him to a woman who, after twelve years' married life was now running after a Swedish count. However, he replied, with perfect seriousness : "I am aware that he had the honour of knowing Madame Montauron. I received a letter from him this morning, in which he expressly urges upon me to request the favour of an introduction to her."

"She will be only too happy to receive you, and that as soon as possible. I told her that you would call."

"Ah !" exclaimed Savinien, with surprise.

"Need I say that she is entirely ignorant of all that occurred between us yesterday morning. I have not said a word to her about the matter, nor could I do so. She had not left her apartments—I am sure of that—and I was very careful to say nothing of my absurd mistake. She little thinks that I ran after a woman who happened to look like her ; and this is very fortunate, for she would have been deeply wounded had she learnt that I suspected her. We breakfasted together this morning, as usual, and I then told her that I expected you. It was the first time that I had ever mentioned your name, and she was scarcely aware that Monsieur de Trémorin had a nephew. She asked me several questions respecting you, and this was only natural, as you are the nephew of an old friend of her family ; but I could only tell her very little, as I was supposed not to have even seen you. She expressed a desire to invite you here, and to do all in her power to make your stay in Paris a pleasant one. Between ourselves it is she who wants to marry you to the orphan with five millions."

"I am greatly obliged to her," stammered Savinien, "but——"

"Oh, don't be alarmed, I repeat it ; it is only a passing fancy, and you are quite at liberty to take no notice of Madame Montauron's intentions. But you must see that she wishes to serve you. If I had entertained the shadow of a suspicion, her words would have sufficed to remove it."

"This woman is very artful, and the man very simple," thought Viscount d'Amaulis.

"You see, besides," resumed the banker, "that we both find ourselves in a curious position as regards my wife. We met yesterday in the way

you know of, and she supposes that we meet to-day for the first time. It is, however, our second occasion of finding ourselves together."

"I beg your pardon—it is the third, and Madame Montauron has already seen me."

"Pray explain. I don't understand you," said the banker, hastily.

"Didn't you come into a pastry-cook's shop near the Bourse at half-past two yesterday afternoon?"

"True! I had quite forgotten that, and I assure you I was greatly embarrassed when I did so. I already knew that my wife was not in fault, and I longed to apologise to you; but in her presence it was impossible. I was obliged to appear as if I did not know you, for how could I have approached you without entering into explanations which it was necessary to avoid?"

"I understand that, sir, but I confess that I was very much surprised when I met you face to face in the shop. I almost expected another sort of scene, as I recognised you at once."

"I saw that you did," said Montauron, with a smile; "I even saw that you prepared to defend yourself; but I had not the least desire to attack you, and I wished to take my wife away with me."

"And so," said Savinien, perfidiously, "it was Madame Montauron who went away in the carriage with you?"

"Yes. I had asked her to wait for me in the shop, as I was obliged to go for a moment on 'Change, and I did not know that chance would bring you there as well."

"Nor did I expect to see you. Chance does things strangely. You might have thought——"

"That you had gone there to have an interview with Madame Montauron? No; that absurd idea did not occur to me. My fit of jealousy was over."

"Not quite, my good fellow," thought Savinien to himself. "You looked through the windows of the shop, and you were much relieved when you saw that I was not paying any heed to your wife's presence."

"Now, that I think of it," resumed the banker, "you recognised the face of the gentleman who picked so foolish a quarrel with you; but you did not know who I was, for, during the stormy words on the threshold of your apartment, I did not tell you my name."

"Oh! true enough I didn't know it then, although I had questioned a person on the steps of the Bourse. I had caught sight of you near the colonnade."

"Where I was talking with several people. You did not ask the right person, for I am very well known; but some one else must have told you, for just now, when you were kind enough to join me in the garden here, you did not appear surprised to find that your enemy of the morning and your uncle's banker were one and the same man."

"I was told your name yesterday. When you were getting into your carriage, one of my friends came up, and, knowing you very well, he told me your name."

"I hope that you said nothing about that unfortunate scene."

"Oh! how can you suppose that for a moment, especially as my friend told me who you were?"

"Excuse me. I spoke thoughtlessly. Of course the Viscount d'Amaulis would not have ridiculed his uncle's banker. May I ask the name of the gentleman you questioned?"

"I have no reason for hiding it," replied Savinien; "it was one of my old chums at the law-school at Rennes. His name is George Fougeray."

M. Montauron made a gesture which showed that he was acquainted with Viscount d'Amaulis' friend.

"Monsieur Bouret knows him," resumed Savinien, "and thinks well of him."

"Oh, I don't think ill of him," replied the banker, "nor did I ever hear any one speak badly about him. He has no debts, although he spends a good deal. He makes money, no doubt, and I don't think that he does so in a wrong way. Still——"

"Say what you mean, sir," said the viscount, seeing that M. Montauron appeared to hesitate in what he was about to add.

"Well, I don't know exactly how to express what I wish to say. My age and my friendship for Monsieur de Trémorin would, perhaps, excuse it, still I should not like to wound your feelings——"

"I am sure that you would not."

"I thank you for saying so; and, since that is your opinion, I will say that Monsieur Fougeray is not sought after by Parisians of real position. I think that your uncle wouldn't care to have you become intimate with a man who does not belong to the society of which you yourself form part."

"Indeed, sir; but I do not belong to any society as yet, for I have merely come here, and I have no intention of belonging to George's set. In the first place I have no money to spend with him."

"Is that your only reason?" asked M. Montauron, smiling.

"I have, also, others for keeping away," said Savinien; "but that one suffices. I had, on the day of my arrival, a specimen of the kind of life which my friend George leads—what with the dinner, theatre, supper, and so on. My small income would not enable me to partake often of this kind of enjoyment, which, besides, has no special charm for me. I must add, however, that, during this transient trip into Parisian regions unknown to me, George only introduced me to well-bred men."

"That is something, but appearances are deceitful. Monsieur Fougeray must be intimate with people of his own sort."

"Really, sir," said Savinien, somewhat offended, "I am sure that your judgment is just and impartial, but I should be obliged to you if you would express yourself more clearly. George was a law-student with me; I have lost sight of him for years; he received me, however, with a cordiality which pleased me, and, although I have no intention of leading the kind of life which he does, I nevertheless rely upon seeing a good deal of him during my stay in Paris. However, should I find that he derived his money from any dishonourable source, I should cease all intercourse with him."

"I meant nothing of that kind, believe me. Monsieur Fougeray is like many others who pursue fortune eagerly, and who often succeed without closely considering the means by which they obtain victory."

"I don't know what you allude to by the word 'means.' Be kind enough to state precisely what you do mean, for, if there were anything disreputable——"

"Disreputable! Oh, no! Besides, the meaning of words has greatly changed of late years. Many people gamble in stock without being less esteemed for that."

"I shall not undertake to pronounce upon the morality or immorality of operations on 'Change, but you, sir, go there."

"I? That is different. I am the manager of a large bank which has to employ the funds subscribed by its shareholders to the best advantage. Hence the absolute necessity for buying and selling stock. On certain days I am even obliged to personally direct the agents who operate for the Provincial Bank. For instance, yesterday when I returned home after the scene you know of, I was informed that bad news as to political matters had arrived, and that an important running-down of shares and Rente was to be feared. I had scarcely recovered from the trouble of the morning, and I was, you will easily believe it, but little disposed to attend to business. It was necessary, however, that I should go at once to the Bourse to watch operations. Bouret went there also, and we were fortunate enough to realise a large amount for our shareholders. They might have met with a loss, had we been less zealous and less competent to see what would occur. Fortunately, I guessed that a manœuvre had been resorted to in order to run down the prices, and that the close would be a running-up."

"George Fougeray thought as you did, sir, and I believe he operated accordingly."

"Oh, I know that! He was in the secret. He even contributed, without knowing it, to the success of Bouret and myself. We had been informed in time that, after having brought about the running-down, he turned to running-up, and, as every one knows he has private information, we followed his lead."

"Information? From whom?"

"You ask me too much, my dear sir. I make it a rule to accuse no one without being able to prove what I say. Now, I have no proof of this. What is certain, however, is that, at about two o'clock, an official despatch was posted up inside the Bourse, contradicting in the most precise manner the alarming rumours afloat. Certain persons, perhaps, knew of it before it was exhibited, and it had, and must have had, a great effect on the public funds. These people were speculating on a certainty."

"Then you think that my friend George——"

"Monsieur Fougeray is very intimate with a Monsieur Rheinthal, who is thought to be the intimate friend of a person of great influence."

"Ah, yes! I saw that Monsieur Rheinthal talking to George yesterday, before the Bourse opened."

"Others saw him besides you, and directed their operations upon the same basis as those of Monsieur Fougeray."

"But, if it is true that George can foresee when shares will vary in value, he ought by this time to be a millionaire several times over."

"No, his credit is not yet sufficiently well established to enable him to enter into large operations. Still he must have done very well, for the powerful people who employ him let him glean in the fields after they have gathered in their own harvest."

"His credit?" repeated Savinien, whose eyes were beginning to open.

"Excuse my ignorance, but all that you say to me is entirely new."

"You don't clearly understand Monsieur Fougeray's position. I will explain it to you. A few years ago he entered a broker's office as a clerk for the cash payments, that is to say the most important and least remunerative operations. He was active and able. He very soon formed connections which enabled him to start in business on his own account. He succeeded very well, it appears, and began to operate on a larger scale, still his ventures never exceeded three thousand francs' worth of Rente.

No broker would have thought him good for any more important operations. Now, however, he is thought to be so well informed that he would find buyers or sellers for thirty thousand. That is a great deal when a man hasn't a well-established fortune, but it is not enough to enrich a speculator suddenly. A franc's difference between the price of buying and selling on thirty thousand represents ten thousand francs, no more—and differences of a franc rarely offer."

"If a man operated on three hundred thousand, what then?"

"The difference of a franc would represent a hundred thousand francs. But Monsieur Fougeray wouldn't find an agent who would consent to pay so large a sum for him in case of loss. Galipot himself would not venture to do so unless your friend gave him good security."

"Galipot?" repeated Savinien, who perfectly well remembered the party in question.

"He is one of the most lucky and daring of our unlicensed brokers. Monsieur Fougeray is one of his customers. You must have seen them talking on 'Change at the opening yesterday."

"Yes, and to my utter astonishment, George Fougeray introduced me to this Monsieur Galipot."

"Ah, indeed! That was strange. Do you remember what he said when he introduced you?"

"No, not exactly. I remember, however, that Monsieur Galipot asked me if I were Monsieur de Trémorin's nephew."

"And you answered in the affirmative? Then I can understand why Galipot came to ask Bouret whether your uncle was a solid man."

"What! Did he dare—"

"Oh, he had no hesitation in doing so, and I now see clearly why he asked for information. Monsieur Fougeray used your name to operate. Didn't you know it!"

"He did so without my permission. He told me so after 'Change, and I would not believe it."

"But you must have received a notice this morning from the broker who operated."

"A notice?" stammered Savinien; "yes, I received one, and I confess that I understand absolutely nothing about it. Indeed, I have not tried to understand, for I thought that the broker must have made a mistake in writing to me instead of to George Fougeray."

"I think not," said M. Montauron, smiling. "Brokers don't make such mistakes, they know very well for whom they operate. But I can answer you better if you have the letter about you and will show it to me."

"Here it is," replied Viscount d'Amaulis, who wished to know exactly in what situation his friend had placed him.

M. Montauron had scarcely looked at the note than he exclaimed:

"This is astonishing!"

"What is it?" said Savinien, anxiously.

"I should never have thought Monsieur Fougeray so daring—it is true he risked nothing. Do you know for how much he speculated yesterday?"

"He told me, but the figure conveyed no idea to my mind, and I forgot it."

"Well then, dear sir, your friend began by selling three hundred thousand francs worth of Rentes. Then, when all was afoot, he bought them back at a lower price to what he had sold at; then, before the close,

he bought six hundred thousand francs worth of Rente, and resold it on advantageous terms. Indeed, he liquidated everything on the spot."

"Yes, I understand that, but I am no better informed. The jargon of Bourse business is Greek to me, and I cannot guess at the final result."

"I will speak more clearly. The three hundred thousand were sold at the rate of eighty-two francs thirty-five centimes, and bought back at eighty-two francs. The difference is thirty-five centimes, which makes thirty-five thousand francs."

"Profit?"

"Certainly."

"That is enormous."

"It is nothing to what followed. He bought at the rate of eighty-two francs six hundred thousand francs' worth of Rente, which was sold again at eighty-three. The difference being a franc, the profit is two hundred thousand francs. The sum total of the profits is two hundred and thirty-five thousand francs, less the brokerage."

"Is it possible?"

"Nothing can be clearer."

"If George has such luck often, he will be a millionaire very soon."

"He will be, and so may you. It is a very fine beginning. One hundred and seventeen thousand five hundred francs for your share."

"My share! I have no part in it, as I did not speculate."

"These people speculated for you, which is exactly the same thing."

"Excuse me? I am free not to take what I have no right to."

"I think that you are wrong, and I will prove it to you. I know precisely the limit of Monsieur Fougeray's credit, and I assure you that Galipot operated for you. He knew that Fougeray was to have half, but that you were security in case of loss for the full amount of the differences."

"But had I lost two hundred and thirty-five thousand francs, sir, I should have been obliged to sell all I possess to pay the amount, and, besides that, the land which I own would not have sufficed to furnish such a sum."

"Monsieur de Trémorin would have paid for you, undoubtedly."

"I am sure that he would not have done so. My uncle has a daughter, and even were his fortune likely to revert to me, it is not large enough to enable him to make so great a sacrifice."

A discreet smile played about the lips of the director of the Provincial Bank, but he said nothing as regarded the means of the viscount's uncle.

"I know Monsieur de Trémorin," he resumed, "and I am certain he would not have allowed his nephew's name to suffer. Bourse debts are debts of honour, although they are, like gambling debts, unrecognised by law. I only tell you this, sir, to show you in what a position your former schoolfellow would have placed you, had the speculation failed."

"Really," exclaimed Savinien, "it is incredible that a broker should plunge into such operations in the name of a man whom he does not know, and who gave him no orders."

"He does not know you, but he knows Galipot, and he knows that Galipot would have paid up had he lost."

"But if this Galipot was responsible, how is it that he had so much confidence in me? He didn't know me."

"Didn't you say just now that Monsieur Fougeray had spoken about your uncle to him. That was quite enough. Galipot only wants to earn

the brokerage, and he went to Bouret to make inquiries. Bouret told him that your uncle was honourable and reliable. I should not be surprised if your friend had said that you were a large landowner. Nothing makes more impression than that on an unlicensed broker."

"It seems to me that George did say something like that," muttered Savinien. "If I had known why he was talking in that style, I——"

"You would have contradicted him, no doubt. You would have perhaps have been wrong."

"How?"

"I will explain that presently, but I must first of all show you clearly how Monsieur Fougeray worked. He received information from high quarters, transmitted to him by Monsieur Rheinthal. He was charged to bring about a fall during the first hour on 'Change, in order to allow certain speculators to buy back at a low rate. The parties who worked the affair knew that a reassuring despatch would come at about two o'clock. Monsieur Fougeray knew it also, and wished to profit by the secret confided to him. But he wanted to make a sum which would prove really remunerative. As his credit with Galipot has its limits, he thought of using yours. You will, no doubt, repeat that you have none, as you are unknown at the Bourse; but Monsieur Fougeray created a credit for you without informing you. You may be sure enough that he sowed the seed by telling Galipot and others that you were a gentleman from the provinces who had come to speculate, and possessed large means. I must add that the brokers would have looked more closely into the matter had the speculation appeared at all risky to them. But they knew that your friend had conferred with Rheinthal before Bourse hours."

"Yes, it is clear," said Savinien. "I understand now that George played me a very ugly trick, and I will not profit by manœuvres of which I utterly disapprove. I shall not reply to this broker, and I will not receive any money."

"But Monsieur Fougeray will wish to have his part of it."

"Let him obtain it, I will not prevent him. He shall have all of it if he wishes."

"You make a mistake, my dear sir. The broker only knows your name, and only will pay to you."

"Well, I shall go to him and declare that all the money belongs to George Fougeray."

"He will not be satisfied with that."

"Then I shall tell him how it was all done."

"I should not advise you to do that."

"Why not, will you tell me?"

"In the first place, it would ruin your friend's credit, and injure him to the greatest possible extent. If it were known in the Bourse world that he used any subterfuge to operate in large amounts, he would in future be unable to find an agent to work for him. You would do him great injury, and I do not think that you wish to harm him."

"No, certainly not; for until yesterday I have had every reason for liking him. But he deserves a good lesson."

"I agree with you, but this would hardly be the occasion to give it to him. By telling the truth you would harm yourself."

"I don't see how."

"Remember, dear sir, that you would be accused of being Monsieur Fougeray's accomplice. It wouldn't be believed that he had acted without



consulting you, and you would appear to have agreed with him to deceive an unlicensed broker as to your solvency."

"But as I abandon my profits——"

"You cannot do so. The broker will require you to receive the money, and even if it remained in his hands, it would none the less be yours. It would be said that you had left it to serve as a cover, that is to say, a guarantee for future operations."

"And what if I draw it out and place the whole of it in George Fougeray's hands?"

"No one would know that or believe it."

"What would you have me do?"

"The only thing that would not compromise you. Say nothing, receive the whole amount, and you can compel your friend, if you choose, to receive it from you. But we will return to this subject, if you like, later on. I see Madame Montauron at the end of the walk, and you must allow me to profit by this opportunity to introduce you."

While M. Montauron and Viscount d'Amaulis conversed together, they had walked round the park without observing that they had done so, and they had returned to their starting-point. At the end of the pathway they could perceive a lady attired in a white morning dress. It was Madame Montauron who was advancing slowly to meet her husband, and carelessly picking some white lilac without appearing to observe the presence of a stranger in the garden.

Savinien felt disturbed, but he did not allow this to be seen, and prepared to play the part required by circumstances.

"She certainly saw me from her window when I rang," said he to himself. "She knew that she would find me here, and she seeks this perilous interview. She is too artful, but I will show her that I am her match."

He momentarily forgot the evil deeds of George Fougeray, and only thought of how he might escape from his annoying position. The look in the husband's eyes proved that he had still a lingering doubt. Indeed, Montauron had glanced at the viscount to see whether he showed any emotion at the sight of Madame Montauron; however, he must have been reassured, for Savinien's manner was irreproachable—that of a man of the world about to be presented to a lady to whom he is as yet unknown. There was a danger to be avoided, and he avoided it. He did not forget that he had already seen her without speaking to her, that her husband knew this, and that it was as well not to pretend having forgotten this chance encounter.

"I ought to have known Madame Montauron in the street," said he, in a low tone, to the banker; "as it was, her beauty and distinguished appearance struck me."

Montauron smiled, well pleased with this compliment, and greeted his wife with a radiant face. "My dear Aurélie," he began, "here is Monsieur Savinien d'Amaulis, whom we have been so impatiently expecting since Monsieur de Trémorin announced his coming. I am glad that you have come down to the garden, as it enables me to introduce him to you before our reception evening."

"Thanks," replied the lady. "On Friday I belong to all our guests, and I should have had no opportunity of telling Monsieur d'Amaulis how much pleasure it gives us to receive him. How long have you been in Paris?" she added, addressing the viscount, who was astonished by her coolness.

"Two days, madame," replied Savinien, "and I beg of you to excuse my tardy visit."

"Don't apologise, my dear sir," cried Montauron. "You could not run to the Parc Monceau as soon as you left the train. But we hold you now, and I hope that we will see you often. Our house will always be open to you. I should be very glad if you came to live in this neighbourhood. I presume that you are at a hotel?"

This question was asked with a careless air, but Savinien guessed that it had a purpose, for the banker was looking askance at his wife.

"Yes," said Yvonne's cousin; "I am in the Rue du Helder, in some furnished rooms, where my uncle puts up when he comes to Paris."

Madame Montauron did not show the slightest emotion on hearing the name of the street which must have brought back such burning recollections, and her husband, delighted with the result of the trial to which he had subjected her, resumed gaily: "Monsieur de Trémorin sent you there, no doubt, and you were right to go, but I think that he ought to have remembered that you would be very far from us, who are his friends and wish to be yours. I am sure that he would not think it amiss if you left the Rue du Helder to come nearer the Avenue Ruysdaël."

"Certainly not, but I don't know whether I should find a hotel that would suit me near the Parc Monceau," replied Savinien, somewhat surprised by this eagerness to monopolise him. "In these aristocratic quarters there are only private residences, I presume?"

"Or very unpresentable furnished rooms. By why shouldn't you take a suite which you could furnish yourself? You will be here for six months—so Monsieur de Trémorin said to me—and it is really worth while to live in that way. Ah! I remember a house belonging to me in which there is a vacant suite that would suit you exactly. It is in the Rue Rembrandt, ten steps from here. We will go to see it."

"Really, my dear," said Madame Montauron, smiling, "if you insist so much, Monsieur d'Amaulis will think that you are trying to palm off on him some rooms which you cannot let."

"Oh, I am sure that Monsieur d'Amaulis will think nothing of the kind. I should be only too glad to put my suite of rooms at his disposal if he would accept of it."

"I don't doubt it," replied Savinien, "and I should be glad to be your tenant on the same conditions that you would make with any one else, but I came to Paris with a credit of six thousand francs, and if I bought any furniture I should scarcely be able to pay for it."

"Is that all!" exclaimed M. Montauron. "Need I say that my cash-box is at your disposal?"

"Thank you, sir, but——"

"You won't accept? Let that pass; but you can furnish your rooms without borrowing. Haven't you at a broker's a sum of money but a tenth part of which would suffice to pay for a very handsome set of furniture suitable for a bachelor?"

"Excuse me, sir. You forget that this sum——"

"I don't forget it, and I have proved to you, I believe, that you cannot abandon this money without seriously embarrassing your friend. I leave it for you to judge, my dear Aurélie. Monsieur d'Amaulis went to the Bourse yesterday. He had never been there before, and one of his friends, without consulting him——"

"What!" interrupted Madame Montauron. "You were at the

Bourse yesterday, Monsieur d'Amaulis ! Did you enter a pastry-cook's shop close by at about two o'clock ?"

"Yes, madame, and I——"

"Then I saw you there. When my husband introduced you just now it seemed to me that I had seen you before, but I could not remember where. I know it now. You remained standing for ten minutes or so a couple of steps from the table where I was taking an ice, and talking with Madame de Gravigny, a pretty blonde, whom you must certainly have noticed, and who was telling me about speculating, which is a thing I don't understand. I remember that you looked attentively at me," added Madame Montauron, smiling.

"I admit that," said Savinien, with a bow. He understood her motive in speaking thus, and, besides, he wished to assist her.

"You saw my husband also, as you were still there when he came in. Why didn't you speak to him then ?"

"Because I did not yet know him."

"True ; how thoughtless I am ! I forgot that you could not guess the name of a person you had never seen."

"One of my friends who came in told me your name just as you were getting into your carriage, but that would have been a bad time to accost Monsieur Montauron."

"If I had known that you were Monsieur Trémorin's nephew, I should not have stood upon ceremony to shake hands with you anywhere," cried the husband, full of satisfaction at this apparently natural explanation. "But I scarcely noticed you. My wife, on the contrary, took a good look at you. You see what it is to be a handsome man," he added, gaily, seemingly thinking that he had made a happy hit.

He rejoiced in his own mind, and he was not alone in this. Madame Montauron flattered herself that she had managed this matter with superior skill, and Savinien felt that his position as regarded the banker was fully cleared up.

"What a strange city Paris is !" sighed Madame Montauron. "Any thing may happen here ! One may pass by a friend without knowing it, and meet an enemy without being able to avoid it."

"Much stranger things than that occur," laughed the husband ; "for instance, making a hundred thousand francs on Change without knowing that one has speculated. I really must tell you this story, my dear Aurélie—but you are not well to-day, and the air is sharp out here. Shall we go indoors with Monsieur d'Amaulis ?"

"I should like to show him the conservatory if he has a few moments to give us," replied Madame Montauron, glancing at Savinien, who saw her design.

"I am exceedingly fond of flowers," he said, eagerly.

"Then come, sir ; my husband will help me to do the honours of our winter garden."

"Willingly," replied the banker, "but here is our friend Bouret coming, and when he appears here in the morning it is because some important matter brings him. I will go and speak to him ; in five minutes I shall know what he wants, and will then return to you."

Savinien drew nearer to Madame Montauron. "It is heaven that sends him," said she, in a low tone, as soon as her husband had gone a few steps away. "We shall be alone for an instant, and I must speak with you."

Montauron had walked rapidly towards his partner. He would, no

doubt, have been less disposed to talk to him about the affairs of the Provincial Bank had he not been completely at ease. But all the trials which he had imposed upon Savinien and his wife had resulted in their complete justification. So he had no further reason for not leaving them alone together.

Savinien congratulated himself on having relieved the mind of Madame Montauron, in whom he felt interested, although he struggled against the sympathy which he felt; at anyrate he would have liked the matter to end there, for he felt no wish to continue mixing himself up in the lady's affairs. He pitied her as much as he blamed her, but he did not wish to be compromised on her account. He could not, however, avoid the conversation which she wished to hold with him; he owed her some explanation, and, if needful, some advice. A man does not abandon a woman after saving her. A service of such a kind exacts others from the person who has rendered it. The viscount was caught in a trap, and fully realised that this was the case. He had made a sign to Madame Montauron to signify that he was at her orders, and then he walked on beside her and waited for her to show him into the conservatory.

M. Bouret, more lively than ever, had bowed to them from afar, and had indeed seemed disposed to approach them, but Montauron took his partner's arm and walked on with him slowly. They spoke together in a tone of animation, even paused at times to exchange their ideas more at their ease, as often happens to persons who are conversing on a subject of interest. To leave them in the distance was easy enough, and Madame Montauron did so. "Come, sir," said she, walking rapidly on. "The conservatory is large and we can be alone for a few moments. Until we are, let us talk about trivial subjects. We are watched, perhaps."

Savinien, in conformity with this advice, started a conversation upon the beauties of the garden, raising his head to measure the height of the trees with his eyes, and pointing to the pretty effects devised by an artist in landscape-gardening. While taking this precaution and prolonging his pantomimic gestures, he admired not only the coolness and skill of Madame Montauron, but her attire and person also.

She wore an exquisite morning-dress of satin and white *barége*, trimmed with flounces of valenciennes, and cut short enough to display her pretty feet encased in high-heeled slippers; a bit of gold lace sparkled on her black hair, which was carelessly caught up off her face, and in her hand she carried a Chinese parasol with a jade handle.

When Savinien had seen her at the Ladies' Exchange he had been struck by the brilliancy of her eyes, but he had not observed that, though she was no longer very young, her beauty was of a kind that owed nothing to art. The full light of a May morning is pitiless to faded beauties; but Madame Montauron did not need the dimness of a boudoir to hide her age. Even in full daylight her opaque white skin did not show a wrinkle. The blue shade around her large eyes had disappeared, and her features retained no traces of the emotions of the day before. She had the engaging and restful look of a hostess doing the honours of her grounds to an agreeable visitor. Her beauty was incontestable, her face sympathetic. Her eyes spoke, her lips expressed goodness. It was impossible to confound this adorable woman with the dolls that fill Parisian drawing-rooms. She was a creature whom a man might love passionately. Moreover, she was destitute of any semblance of coquetry.

"She has deceived her husband, no doubt," thought Savinien, "but I would venture that there is a drama in her life—a mystery."

They reached the door of a winter-garden fit for a prince. All the plants of the tropics were gathered together therein, and one might have almost fancied one's self in a virgin forest, so vigorous were the growths. However, all the apparent wildness was the effect of art. The finest sand strewn the walks, and comfortable seats could be seen on all sides. A fountain plashed in a marble basin amid all this verdure, a rippling stream coursed amid the flower-beds, and at the end there was a large aviary filled with rare birds.

Madame Montauron entered after quickly glancing in the rear, and ascertaining that the two financiers were far off; Savinien followed her, making ready to speak fast and to the purpose, for time was precious.

"You have saved more than my life, you have saved my honour," began the lady. "Thanks to you I was able to fly, and with unexpected good luck I was able to return home before my husband appeared."

"He watched for you during more than an hour at the corner of the Rue du Helder," said Savinien.

"It was that which enabled me to escape. Our house has a door in the Rue Murillo, a door of which I alone have the key, and which our servants know nothing about. When Monsieur Montauron reached my room he found me there, and I had even had time to change my dress."

"He is convinced that you had not left the house, and that he was deceived by a false resemblance."

"Did he tell you that?"

"Yes, madame, and I gave him some explanations which finally dispelled all his fears, if he still had any remaining. I told him that the woman he had followed had gone into the room of one of my neighbours on the third floor, and that she had remained there all day, and he so fully believed all I told him that he apologised to me for the scene he had made, and urgently begged of me to keep the matter a secret from you especially."

"Ah! I knew very well that the Baron de Trémorin's nephew would not fail me!"

"You know my uncle?" asked Savinien.

"He was the means of bringing about my marriage. Did he never mention my name to you?"

"Never, madame. But this morning I received a letter in which he expressly enjoined upon me to solicit the favour of an introduction to you."

"I will tell you later on how it was that Monsieur de Trémorin became interested in me, and when you know my past you will understand all that I have suffered for twelve years; but we haven't a moment to lose, and I beg you to reply to what I am about to ask."

"Speak, madame."

"Is it true that this foreigner, who lodged above you, has gone away?"

"The hotel-keeper so assured me."

"Did he tell you his name?"

"He said that he called himself Count Aparanda; that he was a Swede, and that he was driven to the Northern Railway Station."

Madame Montauron started, and resumed in a husky voice: "Did the hotel-keeper speak of a child?"

"He has never seen any child. The traveller had absolutely no one

with him during the ten days which he spent at the hotel—not even yourself, madame, so said the landlord.”

“Then he went away alone,” murmured the lady, more and more troubled.

“Yes, madame; but he may not have left Paris.”

“Why do you think that?”

“I believe that I met him a few hours after he left the hotel.

“You knew him, then?” asked Madame Montauron, eagerly.

“I had seen him from my window as he crossed the court-yard of the hotel. I then only saw his back, but I observed his figure and his costume especially. When I saw him again he wore a cap, as before, an overcoat, and furred boots.”

“And he was still alone, as before?”

“Quite alone,” said Savinien.

“And no letter, no message!” murmured Madame Montauron, in distress. “What shall I do? What shall I do?”

“If I can serve you any further, make use of me, madame,” said Savinien, much affected.

The native of Brittany spoke thus because he could not control his first impulses, and was always led away by his generous feelings.

“I accept your offer,” replied Madame Montauron, without any hesitation. “When I see you again I will tell you what you can do to deliver me from the torments which tear my heart. I must see you again—not here—and I cannot return to the hotel where you live. Why don’t you follow the advice my husband gave you just now?”

“To live in a house belonging to him!” exclaimed Savinien. “Can you think of such a thing, madame?”

“The rooms he would let to you are on the ground floor. There is a little garden which, like mine, communicates with the Parc Monceau, and I will tell you how we can meet. You can then give me back the casket which you consented to keep for me, and which I dare not ask you to return to me in presence of my servants.”

“I have not got the casket,” replied the viscount, sadly.

“You have not got it!” exclaimed Madame Montauron, who saw through the glass doors that her husband was coming down the walk with M. Bouret.

They had been very long talking, but they were at last reaching the winter-garden, and were about to enter it. Fortunately, they halted for a moment to close their conversation, which seemed to be of great interest, and Savinien still had time to say: “You must remember, madame, that I had refused to keep the deposit which you wished to leave with me. On going away you—perhaps voluntarily—forgot the casket on the table. I noticed it when it was too late to hurry after you. I could not restore it to you, as you had gone, and I could not keep it in a hotel room. My first thought was to place it in a safe spot, and I naturally thought of the banking-house where my uncle had opened an account for me.”

“What! the bank which my husband directs?” asked Madame Montauron, in a state of mingled surprise and agitation.

“I was then ignorant who you were, madame.”

“And you took the casket——”

“To the Provincial Bank,” interrupted Savinien.

“I am lost!” murmured Madame Montauron, quite overwhelmed.

“Lost! Why, madame? This casket is shut up in a compartment of

the vaults of which I alone have the key. No one knows that it is there, and no one will know, as it cannot be touched without my permission. You don't know how these deposits are made. There is a vault——"

"Yes, I know about that, but it is sufficient for the casket to have been seen. My husband knows it."

"But it wasn't he who received it, and it is not to him that I shall apply when I take it out."

"Then you saw some subordinate," said Madame Montauron, somewhat reassured.

"Yes, that is to say, it came about in this manner: I had a letter of credit to present, and a clerk told me that I must have it looked over by the under manager."

"Monsieur Bouret?"

"Exactly. He knew my name, and gave orders to show me into his private room. I did not care to see him, but could not decline. He received me in the most polite manner, and, while I was talking, remarked this casket which I had in my hand. He then explained to me the system of the house with regard to deposits. I thought that I was doing wisely in acting as he proposed."

"He asked you no questions?"

"To find out the nature of the contents? No, madame. It appears that it is against the rule. Deposits are received without examination."

"He may think, then, that there was merely some gold inside, or some bank-notes, or—or jewels."

"I do not know what he thought, but he did not ask me anything on the subject. He went with me to the vault, and was near at hand when I made the deposit."

"He knows in what place the casket is kept, then?"

"I doubt very much whether he remembers the number of the compartment. Why should he? The depositing, which took place before him, was nothing unusual. He sees the same thing every day."

"No doubt, but I know him. He is inclined to meddle with other people's affairs, and must have wondered why Viscount d'Amaulis, who had reached Paris only the day before, should bring a casket to the Provincial Bank. He must have thought that, if it contained valuables, you would have left it at your château in Brittany, and with his suspicious nature he must have suspected——"

"That it contained letters?" hastily interrupted Savinien. "I think that he did speak of persons depositing secret correspondence and compromising papers—it was, perhaps, a sly allusion. Whatever his meaning, however, I said nothing more, nor did he."

"I hope that he will not take it into his head to mention the matter to my husband," murmured Madame Montauron.

"It is altogether improbable that he will, and, if you wish it, I will take out the casket to-morrow; you can let me know how I can return it, and I will hasten to——"

"When we meet again," interrupted Madame Montauron, "I will explain to you what is to be done—on Friday, perhaps, if I can escape from my guests for a moment; but here is Monsieur Montauron. He is coming into the conservatory with Monsieur Bouret. Now! let me show you my flowers," added the lady of the Avenue Ruysdaël, raising her voice. She then led Savinien to a corner which they had not yet examined, as she had probably kept it in reserve to serve as a subject of conversation

when her husband returned. It was truly marvellous. There were there heaps of rhododendrons of every colour, huge clumps of azaleas of all the hues of the rainbow, and some superb roses of all the varieties that modern horticulture has produced. "Here is a 'Grand-Duke Charles,'" said Madame Montauron, touching with her slender fingers a magnificent flower which glowed like a ruby.

"You admire my collection, don't you?" asked the banker, now approaching. "Aurélié formed it, and I think that it is equal to any horticultural exhibition. I am sure that Monsieur de Trémorin would like to see it, for I know that he understands all about flowers."

Savinien was fond of flowers also, but at that moment he was thinking of the little heatherbell which Yvonne had gathered, and which he carried near his heart, for he had carefully placed it in his pocket-book.

"I," resumed Montauron, "am fonder of the simple flowers that grow in the country gardens, pinks, sweet-peas, asters, and mallows, but after all I am only a savage. Ask Bouret, who every day reproaches me for not liking oddities in furniture."

Bouret, who had so far kept himself discreetly in the background, profited by this remark of his partner to come forward and bow to Madame Montauron, who nodded somewhat coldly. He then extended his hand to Savinien, who would willingly have dispensed with the under-manager's company, but had no reason for treating him with rudeness.

"Well, viscount," said Bouret, with that familiar air of his, "you must be pleased with your first attempt on 'Change. Galipot told me this morning that you had netted two hundred thousand. Your venture was a master-stroke."

"Indeed," began Savinien, stammering and flushing to his eyes. "But the gentleman is wrong, and I assure you that——"

"Oh! I know that you will have to share with Fougerey, who must have kept you well informed, but you will still have a neat sum left, and I hope that you will use it to open an account at the Provincial Bank, a current account which will prevent the necessity of breaking in upon your letter of credit. Would you believe it, my dear partner," added he, addressing M. Montauron, "Monsieur d'Amaulis, the nephew of Baron de Trémorin, drew out a pitiful sum of fifty louis yesterday. It is true that he deposited valuables, and that gave me a chance to show him our vaults and the working of our system. He is now one of our subscribers. His compartment is No. 919; he has his key, his word, and we are responsible for a very pretty casket which he left with us."

"A casket!" said M. Montauron, with a frown.

"I mean a kind of coffer in fine steelwork. If it were made in Brittany, it must have been by some Parisian workman, unless it be an antique—I hadn't time to examine it closely—but I shouldn't be surprised if it dated from the Renaissance—Montauron knows that I am a connoisseur."

Savinien, overwhelmed by this flow of talk, hung his head to hide his flushed countenance, and could not find a word to answer the giddy individual whose chattering put him on thorns.

However, Madame Montauron, who was as much disturbed as he, came to his relief. "Gentlemen," said she, "as you mix business and flowers together, you must excuse my leaving you."

"Oh, madame!" exclaimed Bouret, gallantly, "the punishment is too severe, and we don't deserve it. I beg your pardon, and I assure you that I will not say another word about money before you. I hear



too much about it elsewhere. Besides, I am going. I came to tell Montauron of a difficulty which has occurred with one of our agents with regard to some orders given yesterday on 'Change. I have done so, and I am expected in the Avenue de l'Opéra. I must make haste."

This said, the lively under-manager took leave of Madame Montauron, inflicted a second hand-shaking upon Viscount d'Amaulis, and went off without the slightest attempt being made to detain him.

The banker had become thoughtful, and although his wife showed no sign of the anxiety she felt, Savinien understood what she was enduring, and thought that his best course was to leave. M. Montauron doubtless thought the same, for he said :

"I hope that when you write to your uncle you will say that we have met, and shall soon meet again. I hope, too, that you will soon consent to become my tenant for the period of your stay in Paris."

Savinien glanced stealthily at Madame Montauron, and read in her eyes that she hoped that he would take the rooms in the Rue Murillo. He also saw that she wished him to go. He, therefore, thanked the husband for the obliging offer, gave him to understand that he was disposed to accept it, and then departed, much more anxious than when he arrived. The visit upon which he had relied to clear away every difficulty had led to complications of a new kind.

#### IV.

"My dear fellow, you must certainly belong to some club if you wish to be thought anything of," said the Marquis Adhémar de Laffemas to Savinien, whom he had just met at the Boulevard des Italiens.

It was two days after Viscount d'Amaulis' visit to M. Montauron ; four o'clock had struck at the Bourse, and the young native of Brittany, already quite acclimated, was leaving a pretty house in the Rue Richelieu, one of those six-storey houses with four staircases, which are built in that part of Paris for the express use of tailors, dressmakers, and brokers.

"I should like it very well," modestly replied Savinien, "but I am only a bird of passage here in Paris, and I am quite unknown."

"That is my reason for proposing you should join my club."

"What do you mean?" quickly asked Savinien, suspecting some intentional impertinence.

"The deuce ! you are as hot-headed as the colt that I just bought at the Chamant stud farm," cried the marquis, with a laugh. "I haven't the least intention, my dear cousin, of insulting you. You don't know how the land lies here, and I wish to tell you, that's all. The best way to get into a club is to be brought there an utter stranger, providing one has an honourable name, and a competency, of course. If you are known, some people always want to keep you out, whatever your merits may be, and take a pleasure in blackballing you when you are voted for. Only lately a very fine young man was refused at our place because his nose was crooked—yours isn't, I beg to say—and another because he wore too long a waistcoat. Now, that is not the case with you ; you dress well. I really wonder whether that pair of trousers was made at Plouër ?"

"No. At Rennes."

"I will make a note of that to the credit of the old capital of the

Duchy of Brittany, and I resume my discourse. Last week a third candidate was blackballed—you will never guess why—well, because he had got the better of that rough bear Pontaurmur in the good graces of Blanche Taupier. You know Blanche Taupier of the Nouveautés Theatre, the actress who drives every day in the Bois de Boulogne with a pair of coffee-coloured jades, who look like the legendary horses which were used at the coronation of Napoleon the First."

Savinien shook his head to signify that the fame of this damsel had not reached the manor of Plouër.

"Good! You never saw her! I congratulate you. She is worse than her ponies, which are ugly enough. Well, then, my dear boy, Pontaurmur, who is an idiot, has nevertheless some influence at the club, and he bestirred himself to such effect that he kept out his fortunate rival. This might happen to you if you had even been here but a month, for you can't think of avoiding the pretty creatures who drive round the lakes, and the one whom you may flatter by your preference will be sure to be admired by some one else, whom you will supplant, no doubt, but who may revenge himself if he happens to belong to our club."

"I'm not afraid of any such event," muttered Yvonne's cousin.

"There is no telling, my dear fellow, and I advise you to profit by your being a stranger, to put yourself up for election at once. I will bring the matter forward, and there will be no great merit in doing so. I'll propose, then, the Viscount d'Amaulis, of a noble and honourable Breton family—the name alone would suffice—and, besides, there must be some old fellows in the club who remember uncle Trémorin, and will back you. As I was saying: Viscount d'Amaulis, twenty-four years old, related to the Loudinières, the Laffemas—to whom I belong myself—with a fortune of—how much is your fortune, cousin?"

"I have six thousand francs a year," candidly replied Savinien.

"Oh, indeed! I thought you were richer than that, but no matter! You will marry an heiress some fine day. Your cousin, Madame de Loudinières, always has one on hand, without speaking of those whom you will meet, if you choose to go into the society to be found at bankers' houses. I will not dwell upon the theme, then. I will say, 'With landed estates;' that always sounds well."

"They all say the same thing," thought the last of the Amaulis, who remembered George Fougerey's words as to the influence of land on credit.

"You will be unanimously elected," concluded M. de Laffemas, "and you will see that it is a good thing to be one of us. In the first place, it is an advantage in betting at races. We know all about the tips! I will take you to the races and show you how to make a book in a way that will make you sure of winning. Since the first spring meeting I have thirteen hundred louis to the bad, but I wouldn't give my future profits this year for three thousand. You will see how it will be at the autumn races."

"I shall miss them, as I shall return to Plouër then."

"Now, don't tell me that! You talk like a schoolboy on his holidays. You will stay as long as your money holds out, and I suppose that you didn't venture upon Parisian waters without any ship-biscuit in your hold."

"I have a trifling account which my uncle opened for me."

"He might have opened a large one, for he is very well off, that worthy Trémorin. My mother can tell you to a figure all the fortunes in Brittany, and she was saying only yesterday that your uncle has millions

stored away. It appears that he has a daughter, and that she is a charming girl. Is there a marriage afoot? I shouldn't pity you in the least. But don't hurry. There is always time enough to settle down. Meantime, I will take you to the races on Sunday."

"I shall be delighted to go with you."

"And I'll venture to say that you will win. People always win the first time they bet—besides, I'll tell you the safest horses. But what ails you? You keep putting your hand into your side pocket. Did you just leave Rothschild's?" asked the marquis, with a loud laugh.

"No; but I am not in the habit of carrying bank-notes about with me, and I have just received a large sum from a broker."

"Already! Ah! there now! you are much further ahead than I thought. Only ten days here, and already gambling on 'Change! And to good effect, too, it would seem. So much the better, cousin! so much taken from the enemy! The Bourse was invented to regild the escutcheons of the nobles who lost their fortunes in the Revolution. I have tried it, and I did well. The worst of it is that you meet such horrid people; but one gets used to that. However, take my advice, and never run on a *series*. That sort of thing is only good at Monaco. Under the colonnade at the Bourse only sudden strokes amount to anything. Don't go there unless you have some news that has not yet been turned to account, and, when you have, go in head foremost! Unfortunately, those chances seldom happen with people like ourselves, as the government neglects informing us beforehand."

"Then, if you were informed, you would not feel any hesitation in acting upon such information?"

"Do you take me for a knight of olden times? I belong to the present day, and I am not ashamed of it. There are things that I would not do for all the treasures of the earth: but it is not forbidden to take advantage of news one has not obtained in any underhand way, any more than it is forbidden to play cards with greenhorns when one happens to know more than they do."

Savinien said nothing, but he noted his cousin's opinion, which coincided with that of M. Montauron as to the honesty of a gentleman in profiting by a speculation on 'Change. M. de Laffemas went so far as to declare that it was quite fair to use private information from government sources.

"I leave you to the care of Providence, so to speak, my dear cousin," added the marquis; "for having thus given you the benefit of my private and personal views, I must leave you. Pontamur is waiting for me at the club to have his revenge at *bélique*, and I want to win a few points before dinner so as to teach him not to vote against my friend. I will get you another backer while I am there. There is an election this month, and I won't let the chance slip by. I will do it all myself, as I presume you have not seen any one in our set since you came to Paris."

"No one but your mother and Madame de Loudinières."

"And they don't count, of course. But have you been introduced anywhere else?"

"I have called upon Monsieur Montauron, my uncle's banker."

"Did you see his wife?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because my mother was somewhat acquainted with her formerly. Madame Montauron is of good family, and she married beneath her. She

is excusable, however, as she had not a penny. But you haven't seen any of the 'irregulars' who live in such a luxurious style?"

"No, indeed; and I don't——"

"Oh!" interrupted the marquis, "don't say that you don't intend to see them. Go, cousin; but, as I said of the Bourse, not often. Prudence is best."

Having thus expressed his opinions, the marquis shook hands, English fashion, and left his young cousin in all haste.

Savinien had no desire to detain him. He was very glad to be alone to reflect upon many things, and besides, while proceeding along the boulevard, he had reached a point opposite the Café Tortoni, and wished to cross over the way to see whether Fougeray was there. He had been looking in vain for him during forty-eight hours or so. However, before crossing the boulevard, Savinien paused to reflect undisturbed. It was an hour when free and easy locomotion is an impossibility. Interminable rows of vehicles were passing along,—some going towards the Bastille, others towards the church of La Madeleine; there were victorias in which sat painted damsels, and phaetons driven by fashionable dandies, which were trying to pass one another in the middle of the street; while huge omnibuses with three horses rushed without the least ceremony between the files of private carriages, which had to turn aside to allow them to pass. The sight recalled the simile of an ironclad scattering a fleet of little boats.

Viscount d'Amaulis had a firm tread and a quick eye, but he lacked the essentially Parisian gift of profiting at once by a chance for gliding between two moving vehicles. He was in no great hurry, however, and was glad to have an opportunity of thinking a little before meeting George Fougeray. He still felt some resentment towards him, although he was bringing him a large bundle of bank-notes just given him by the broker. Savinien had followed M. Montauron's advice. Not to injure his friend, he had decided to be silent as to the part Fougeray had played in the transaction, and he had received, without a murmur, the large sum of two hundred and thirty thousand francs—with the brokerage off, which was a trifle—and the packet of notes in his pocket was large and annoying. He was very anxious to get rid of the cash; and as on the evening before, to his great astonishment and annoyance, he had been unable to find Fougeray, he had now made up his mind not to go home till he had seen him.

The conversation of his cousin Adhémar, a relative who was converted to Parisian ideas, had not changed his opinion as to George's conduct, but it had troubled him.

"They are all the same," he said to himself, sadly. "The Golden Pig! The Golden Pig of my dream! I thought that George was shameless in burning incense before it. He came here without a copper, and wanted at all risks to make money. He was in the wrong, no doubt, but he hadn't a farthing; he didn't belong to an old family, and his poverty excuses him to a certain extent. But here is a true nobleman of undeniably good stock and title, who is rich, and will some day be still richer, as he is the son, and the only one, of a marchioness, with an income of eighty thousand francs a year; still he thinks of nothing but money, talks of nothing but money, and has the same ideas as to obtaining it as my companion at the Rennes law-school. He approves of people who profit by unpublished news; he boasts of betting on certainties at races; he

declares that Madame Montauron did well in marrying M. Montauron, because he was a millionaire and she had no dowry; he advises me to turn my title of viscount into money by a rich marriage; and when he mentioned my cousin Yvonne, it was to find out what her fortune amounted to. What, then, is this Paris, where the best people are infected with a golden plague, which turns their heads and withers their hearts?"

Having relieved his mind by this speech, which he had not, however, the bad taste to deliver out loud, the simple-minded native of Brittany asked himself whether, in the provinces, there was not more uprightness than in Paris. There people do not juggle with millions as in Paris, but they seek them with undying tenacity. To save is the first and only thought. Fortunes and dowries are more thought of and more closely calculated in the country than anywhere else; and gold alone, lord of the world, is the unfailing theme of every tongue.

"My uncle doesn't talk of money incessantly, but he sometimes does," muttered Savinien. "My aunt has a mania for calculating the profit on every farm within six leagues of us. There is only dear Yvonne who never thinks or speaks of money."

The recollection of his cousin gave rise to other thoughts. Savinien had reached a moment when it was necessary for him to decide what life he would lead during his stay in town. He had not yet made up his mind, and did not yet know how to determine upon his course. Arriving with no end of good intentions, he had suddenly discovered the most dazzling temptations in the near future; fashionable life, clubs, horses, and all that Paris gives for gold. It was another "Temptation of Saint Anthony" revised, corrected, and considerably added to. Savinien d'Amaulis was no saint. He remained firm, however; he swore to resist the tempters who assailed him, and to fly from danger as soon as possible. He would willingly have returned to Plouër, even though he might be obliged to confess to his uncle Trémorin that no young man could hold out when he was but twenty-four years old against six whole months of temptation.

However, fatality had thrown in his way a still unfinished affair. Bound by chains which it did not depend upon him to sever, Savinien could not depart before having fulfilled his mission as a protector. Besides, M. de Trémorin, who had long known Madame Montauron, would have advised his nephew to remain upon the defensive in her behalf, and the poor woman greatly needed his help. He had that casket, that fatal casket from which, like the box of Pandora, all sorts of evil might emerge.

How could he restore it to the woman from whom he had received it? It was necessary to wait till she afforded him some safe opportunity for placing it in her hands unseen. She had promised to do so, but not until the following Friday evening.

What could he do in the meantime? He need only go to the Provincial Bank, and, seen by none but an office-clerk, who would feel no interest in the matter, open compartment No. 919 and take out the terrible casket. But, in the first place, he did not wish to keep it by him, having only his trunk or a wardrobe in which he could place it. Besides, he had seen that M. Montauron had listened attentively to the talkative Bouret, and that his face had clouded when that merciless gossip had amused himself by describing the casket deposited by M. d'Amaulis, and proclaiming the number of the compartment hired by this new subscriber. It was evident that the description had reminded the husband of some familiar

object, one belonging to his wife no doubt, and that his suspicions were again aroused.

It was yet to be seen whether Montauron was not the kind of man to have himself warned whenever Viscount d'Amaulis presented himself at the vault. Montauron had not the power or the actual possibility of violating the privacy of a deposit in the banking-house of which he was the head, but still he was the master of the situation. There was nothing to prevent him from instructing his clerks to detain the depositor of No. 919 whenever he made his appearance to take back the casket, and to keep him until he, Montauron, summoned by the telephone, could come in as if by chance so as to see the deposit withdrawn.

The banker was well enough acquainted with M. d'Amaulis to make it extremely awkward for the latter to refuse to allow him to go down to the vaults with him, and his presence would necessarily greatly perplex Savinien. So there was a great risk ahead, and the viscount could not take upon himself to rush forward to meet it without previously consulting Madame Montauron as to the best moment for the perilous attempt.

He had arrived at the point of even feeling curious to know what there could be in the casket to cause the banker's wife such agony of mind.

Letters? That was the first thought that had occurred to him. But why was the casket so heavy if it only contained a lot of letters, love missives perhaps? Gold or precious stones? In that case Madame Montauron would appear to have defrauded her husband, so to speak, for the sake of that foreigner covered with furs who left his hotel at such an unearthly hour, and who, instead of taking the train, went to deposit his enormous chest at the Provincial Bank.

Savinien dismissed this last idea. A well-born woman, a woman whom M. de Trémorin had known when a girl, and in whom he was still interested, might perhaps have a lover, but surely not one whom she gave money to. Savinien had not had time to inform Madame Montauron fully respecting his last meeting with Count Aparanda, but he relied upon doing so when he could speak freely with her, and he thought it unlikely that she would withhold from him the secret of the contents of the mysterious casket. Since their short interview in the conservatory she had made no sign; but M. Montauron had, on the following day, written a very friendly note to remind Savinien that the rooms in the Rue Rembrandt were at his disposal. His persistence on this point had indeed seemed strange to Yvonne's cousin.

The latter had proceeded thus far in his thoughts, when from the sidewalk, where he stood awaiting an opportunity to cross the boulevard, he caught sight of George Fougeray standing upon the top step of the entrance of the Café Tortoni; George himself, with a cigar between his lips, a stick in his hand, and his hat pushed back. He appeared to be on the point of going off, and Savinien, who feared he might miss him, darted between the vehicles crowding the roadway. As he did so he pressed his hand upon the pocket-book containing the precious notes which Fougeray, Rheintal and Galipot had, so to speak, thrust upon him.

Although not yet as agile as a Parisian, Savinien d'Amaulis crossed the boulevard without any accident from the crowd of vehicles, and reached the opposite side of the way just as George Fougeray was coming down the steps of the legendary café, which every gay liver of the century has entered, for Tortoni's establishment was opened under the Consulate.

George raised his arms as he perceived his friend, described a circle

in the air with his cane, and hastened towards him. "There you are at last?" he exclaimed, taking his arm.

"At last?" cried Savinien, "I have been looking for you for two days."

"And without finding me, that is true."

"I have been four times to see you."

"I took care not to come across you."

"You kept out of my way? Will you oblige me by telling me why?"

"My dear boy, you uttered such heresies at the Bourse on the day before yesterday, and expressed such absurd sentiments, that I renounced your conversion for the time being. I left you to join the worthy Galipot, you will remember."

"I saw that, but that does not explain why——"

"Learn," interrupted George, "that I make it a principle never to wrestle with the ridiculous notions which my friends may take into their heads. I rather give them time for reflection. You had an attack of countrified squeamishness, and you were preaching a sermon: 'I speculate with shares! Oh, no! A gentleman of Brittany sells his oxen and his oats, but he scorns to dabble in stock!' and so on. So I thought that I would allow time for your virtue to simmer down, and I fled from you."

"If you will let me speak, I——"

"I thought, you see, that you might go on like that for forty-eight hours. To-morrow morning would have been about the time to meet you, and I was sure that the worst would be over. Besides, I knew that the payment would be made to-day, and I did not wish to see you till after it was made."

"You have a pretty opinion of me, it seems, since you expected I should go after the money."

"I think that you have too much common sense to refuse Fortune when you have only to extend your hand to grasp her, and, if I am not wrong, you received the money."

"What do you know about it?" said Savinien, in vexation.

"My dear fellow, I know the bearing of a man who has just received a big packet of notes. Take away your hand which you are holding to your heart like a lover in a play, unbutton your overcoat and let me see the portfolio that makes your pocket bulge out. You have just left the broker's office, that is easy to see."

"Well, yes, I have."

"Excellent! I knew that you would go. It would have been too bad not to do so, and I know that you are no fool."

"Oh, I received this money simply because it was proved to me that I could not do otherwise."

"Who proved that?"

"Monsieur Montauron."

"You consulted him to quiet your conscience! That is too much!" exclaimed George, with a burst of laughter. "Montauron as a casuist; that is capital, upon my honour!"

"I told him the situation in which you had placed me in spite of myself."

"What! you told him that I had used your name to speculate? You need not have done that, I must say!"

"You forced me to do so. I received a letter from a broker which I did not understand. I showed it to him in order to have an explanation."

"Oh, simplicity! If I had thought you so ignorant, I would have

given you a lesson. I did attempt it, but you would not listen to me. Well! you know all about it now, and you could not have found any better teacher than Montauron. He knows all the tricks of the trade. Come! what did he say?"

"He explained to me, in the first place, that, thanks to divers manœuvres, which I did not attempt to comprehend, I had made an immense sum—two hundred and thirty-five thousand francs."

"With the brokerage off, that is correct."

"I objected, I beg you to believe it, and as I did not wish that he should think that I had risked losing without the means of paying, I told him what had taken place. I told him that you had not asked my permission when you speculated in my name, and that——"

"I will wager that he did not rave against me."

"He said that, unfortunately, these things were done by your associates."

"There! I was sure of it."

"Yes, but it does not follow that he approves of them."

"It appears, however, that he advised you to accept payment," sneered George.

"Yes, so as not to place you in a very bad position."

"The fact is, that the hundred thousand which are my share, are much better adapted to my pocket than to the broker's cash-box. They come just in time, and I should have been greatly annoyed not to have received them."

"That isn't the question. I wished to go to the broker and tell him that he was mistaken, or that he had been deceived—that my ignorance had been taken advantage of, and that the sum belonged to the person who had carried on the operation in my name, which I had not authorised him to use."

"*Him*, that's myself, George Fougeray. That was a nice idea! And so Montauron kept you from carrying it out?"

"He said that it would injure you in the minds of people on 'Change.'"

"Greatly, that is true. It would have sufficed to stop my credit, that is to say, to ruin me. What harm have I done you, my friend? What do you wish to beggar me for?"

"I did not understand what would be the consequences of my declaration."

"Thanks to Montauron, however, you now comprehend. The lynx has his good traits, it appears. Tell me exactly what he bade you do."

"He told me to say nothing, to receive the money, to hand it all to you, and to tell you at the same time not to do the same thing again."

"I have no doubt that he told you to be quiet and to receive the money. Montauron has plenty of common sense and understands business. But the rest is your own invention, my dear friend. I recognise your chivalrous style."

"Whether the idea be mine, or suggested to me, does not matter. I am resolved to carry it out, and without delay. You must, therefore, take these notes, which I do not care to carry about with me any longer."

"Here! on the boulevard, before dozens of people who know me! You don't see that all the fellows taking their absinthe in front of Torton's are looking at us? Among them there are several Bourse men, who would immediately guess that you were handing me the profits of the settlement. They know that it is pay-day at the agents' offices, and that I have no



account with them. Seeing you hand me bundles of notes of ten thousand francs each, they would fan the flame, and when it spread, woe be unto us!"

"To you, perhaps."

"And to you, for they would say that you were my man of straw."

Savinien started, and almost became angry. But he realised that George was in the right, and that the place was ill-chosen to settle their accounts.

"So be it," said he, "let us go to your place, or come to my lodgings near by, but, at all events, let us end the matter."

"Well! well! there is no hurry," said George, who was firmly resolved to accept his share only, and wished to gain time. He relied on Savinien abandoning his lofty view of the matter before the cock crowed thrice, and to bring this about, had a plan of his own. "Oblige me by accompanying me first of all to a sale at the auction rooms in the Rue Drouot," said he. "I have some purchases to make there, and will show you some *curios*, and, besides, I have something new to tell you."

"Thanks," replied Savinien. "I prefer to return to my hotel, where I rely upon your calling in an hour's time to rid me of this money."

"Are you seriously offended with me?"

"I am greatly annoyed at what you have done."

"Does that mean that you no longer consider me your friend?" asked George, with sincere feeling, which touched Savinien.

"Well!" cried Yvonne's cousin, "I am ready to believe that you did not understand the seriousness of your act, and that you won't do such a thing again."

"Oh, no! that I promise you. I acted with a good intention; I was pleased to associate my favourite friend with a stroke of good luck that dropped from the skies. I did wrong, and I hope that you will overlook it, for I would rather lose all I have and live on fifty francs a month, as I did at Rennes, than that you should be at variance with me."

Savinien's anger did not hold out against such sincere language as this. He liked George very much, and would have regretted breaking with him, so he shook his hand and accompanied him towards the Rue Drouot.

"Let us talk of something else," said Fougeray. "I have a surprise in store for you, but I wish to keep it back for a while, and save my 'grand effect' till the end. Learn that yesterday we received at the club to which I belong two new members, both of them noblemen. The first is a Swede, whose name has an Italian termination. He is called Count Aparanda."

"Count Aparanda!" exclaimed Savinien, starting so suddenly that George stopped short and stared at him.

"What's up now?" cried he. "It wasn't that name that I meant to surprise you with. I had arranged my scenes to produce an admirable effect, and I had another name in reserve as my final tableau, as it were, and now you leap five feet into the air as soon as I mention the first one. What ails you? Why are you astonished that a Scandinavian gentleman should honour the Plungers' Club with his presence? Does your jerking about arise from the fact that his name ends in *a*? That happens every day in this country. As a proof of it, there's the 'Vie Parisienne' being played now at the Variétés Theatre—Offenbach's music, you know, with Metella's song:

"Recall to your mind if you can.  
That generous and great nobleman,  
Jean Stanislas, Baron Frascata."

Now, this Frascata is a Swede in the play, so why shouldn't our Count Aparanda be a Swede as well? I bring forward the most reliable authors, you see."

"It isn't that, but——"

"But what? Do you know this northern lord?"

"No; but I have heard of him."

"That doesn't surprise me. He formerly lived in Paris, it appears, and has not been forgotten there, although he had been absent for ten years. Tell me, however, what did you hear about him?"

"Nothing," answered Savinien, at a loss what to reply.

"Then what does it matter to you if he has joined the club? I give you my word of honour that I think you must be in love, for you no longer seem to know what you are saying."

"You talk at random yourself. I may have some special reason for being curious about this foreigner, and yet I may wish to keep the matter to myself."

"Good! There's a woman in the case—you may as well confess it."

"I confess nothing. Believe what you please, but tell me all that you know about Count Aparanda."

"I ask no better, but I know very little. It is said that he is very rich—owning pine forests and iron mines in his own country. I am not a believer in fortunes of that kind, but whether he be a millionaire or a beggar is nothing to me. It is said, besides, that he formerly made a great many conquests among the fair sex, and he is still looked upon as a handsome sentimentalist."

"Handsome! Is he handsome?"

"Bah! He was pointed out to me last evening on the boulevard, and I am obliged to confess that his face is not wanting in character; but I think that he has a certain bearishness about him. He has a beard like a sapper's."

"That is the man," thought Savinien.

"You will soon have an opportunity of judging of his moral and physical attributes."

"How? Where?"

"I now reach the 'grand effect.' The surprise, the real one! I told you that we had voted for two gentlemen. The first was Count Aparanda, the other—can't you guess?"

"No, indeed."

"The other was yourself."

"That is too much! Did I ask you to propose me? You have a perfect mania for bringing me into things without consulting me."

"I had no need to consult you, I was sure that you would accept."

"You were mistaken. I do not wish to belong to any club."

"Any club; of course not, but the Plungers' Club, that is another matter. Everybody would like to belong to that."

"Everybody except myself."

"What can you say against the club? It is composed of very agreeable people, the dinners are capital, and there is a good game every night. Is it the name that alarms you? I'll bet that you do not know its meaning."

"Oh, I don't care to know it."

"Oh! it isn't a mystery. You see it applies to those unlucky card-players who plunge too deep."

"A pretty notion, and such a name is really calculated to tempt me! If I wanted to belong to a club it wouldn't be to that one."

"Why shouldn't you belong to a club?"

"Because card-playing goes on at all of them, and I have no money to lose."

"You would win. I watched you at baccarat the other evening, and you had the devil's own luck. But you are not obliged to play against your own inclination."

"What should I do there, then?"

"Make agreeable acquaintances. We are a jolly party and have no end of fun. You will belong to us and I'll answer for it that you will enjoy yourself."

"As I did on the first evening I spent here? Thank you, I am not rich enough for that. Just now, my cousin Adhémar de Laffemas proposed to have me admitted at his club—the 'Jockey.'"

"If you refused you made a mistake. It would give you a social position at once."

"I neither accepted nor refused."

"Then you will be admitted; but that need not prevent you from belonging to the 'Plungers.' It is very fashionable to belong to several clubs."

"Very fashionable and very expensive."

"Do you count the pleasure of our meeting every day for nothing? You can't imagine how difficult it is in Paris for friends to meet when there is not a regular place for it. I, myself, can't belong to the Jockey. If you should propose me as a member, I should be threatened with a general black-balling. But at the Plungers I am at home. If you care to see me often you will come there. Besides, you are elected, and if you refuse you will place me in a ridiculous position."

"So much the worse for you. You should have consulted me before proposing me. You want to force me in against my will."

"How could I imagine that you would refuse. And under pretext of economy, too! Innocent being that you are, let me tell you that you will get a dinner there for five francs that would cost you forty anywhere else."

"I will dine for six somewhere else, then."

"I defy you to do so unless you wish to dine like a coal-heaver. Come now, Savinien, I have told my friends that you would come this evening? You are down for the best table."

"The deuce take the best table."

"Don't put such an affront upon me as to force me to dine there without you. It will be thought that I am some Gascon who has been boasting that he has a viscount among his acquaintance, while the viscount turns up his nose at him. If you don't join the club I shall send in my resignation."

"You would, perhaps, be doing a good thing."

"You would not regret, then, depriving me of a pleasure to which I attach great importance, and upsetting all my daily plans?" The obstinate native of Brittany did not reply, and Fougerey as a final argument exclaimed: "Do you wish to lose the chance of seeing and thoroughly investigating the affairs of Count Aparanda?"

"Count Aparanda!" repeated Savinien, who, stunned by this flood of words, had forgotten the fur-clad individual.

"Yes. He is coming to dine with us. I shall take good care to place

him between you and me at table. That will seem quite natural, as you were both elected on the same occasion. You must become acquainted, and since this man interests you, you can converse with him as long as you like."

This time George succeeded. Savinien remembered the part played by the Swede in the mysterious adventure of Madame Montauron, and he said to himself that he would no doubt be doing an immense service to the banker's imprudent wife if he could give her some information as to the life led by the traveller who had left No. 26. The Plungers' Club presented no seductions to him, but he reflected that he would not be obliged to go there again after once appearing. He would be at liberty after paying his subscription, which his previous winnings at cards enabled him to settle without inconvenience.

"If I were sure that Count Aparanda would dine there to-day," he muttered, "I might, perhaps, do the same."

"I give you my word of honour I saw his name inscribed next to yours on the dining-list. Come! it's agreed, and so that you shan't have a chance of changing your mind I shall not leave you. I shall take you first to the auction rooms. Here we are."

Their lively conversation had, indeed, lasted until they had reached the Rue Drouot.

"What takes you to the auction rooms?" asked the viscount.

"I am going to buy some furniture. Since my hit on 'Change I have no fancy for my second floor rooms in the Rue d'Antin. I have taken a better suite in the Rue Scribe. Come with me, you will find some pretty object of art to give as a present to your cousin."

Savinien said nothing, but followed George, who led him along the Rue Drouot.

Savinien had no curiosity about the auction sale, and knew that his dear Yvonne would prefer a mere flower plucked for her by him to all the objects of art in the world. But he reflected on the possibility of meeting Count Aparanda that evening, and now that he had made up his mind to remain with his friend until dinner time, he thought it as well to while away the afternoon in a saleroom as in the street.

"I shall have a better chance to reflect," thought he. "While George is busy buying furniture during the auction, he will leave me in peace. I really need it, for my head whirls. It would seem to be my destiny to do the opposite of what I wish. I almost refused my cousin Laffemas' offer to propose me at the Jockey, and now I find myself a member of the Plungers' Club, without having requested that honour, just as the other day I won on 'Change without wishing it, and just as I find myself, against my will, mixed up in Madame Montauron's intrigues. But there is one thing that I won't do: I won't use any of the money in my pocket for myself. George may talk as long as he likes, but he shall rid me of it before dinner, or we shall quarrel. If he refuses to take it, I will send it to him in a registered letter."

While holding this converse with himself, Savinien still felt his side-pocket, and George said to him, laughing: "Seal up your coat hermetically, my dear boy! I am about to take you to a place where all kinds of people resort, and there are some to whom I would not trust my purse."

"Then let me go to my house to wait for you," said Savinien, eagerly.

"Pshaw! I am joking. I have often gone into this place with

thousands about me, and no one has touched me. It is only fools who are robbed. Pickpockets single them out by their faces. Fortunately you don't look any more countrified than I do."

"Never mind, I should much prefer your taking the money. It is very much in my way."

"It would be much more in mine. I shall make offers for the furniture I may fancy, and in the heat of bidding I might forget that I had a lot of money in my pocket; but you, a mere spectator of the wrangle, will have all your wits about you. What a child you are! Why do you trouble yourself?"

Viscount d'Amaulis' self-love prevented his objecting any further, after these compliments, but he promised himself that he would not take his hand off his treasure.

They had reached the corner of the by-no-means majestic building, which was erected some thirty years ago to take the place of the old Hôtel Bullion, and which the Parisians of bygone days persisted in calling Hôtel Bullion still. The front of the edifice was covered with bills of every colour. Sales of a rich and handsome set of furniture; a sale of diamonds, trinkets, silver, and lace belonging to Mademoiselle X—, the dramatic artist; a sale of a very fine collection of old paintings belonging to the deceased Van S—, a celebrated connoisseur of Bruges; sales of Rouen *faïence* and Italian majolica; sales of Persian arms and Japanese bronzes—nothing was wanting in the announcements posted up, all who had a mania for artistic furniture or *curios* only had to enter the place to find something to their individual taste, and the most modest citizen looking for a second-hand set of goods and chattels might have done the same.

George Fougeray, who thought himself called upon to appear at all of the interesting art sales, and most especially at the one announced very pompously by a fashionable damsel, was well acquainted with the manner in which matters went on at the so-called Hôtel des Ventes. They reached the entrance in the Rue Drouot, and as George pushed open one of the swinging-doors, he motioned to Savenien to pass in first. "Go before me all the time," said he, "and if any suspicious face is seen near by, I will warn you."

Spring is the season for great sales. Just when the lilac-bushes flower, many persons experience a desire to get rid of their furniture. It would be difficult to say why they choose this time rather than any other to sell or buy, but such is the case. The place was full of people, and it was the hour of the afternoon when bidding is usually at its height. The best lots are invariably kept till the last—that is, until the Bourse has closed and wealthy speculators have had time to reach the rooms.

The arched hall resounded with the voices of the criers, emphasised by the hammers of the auctioneers. The stairs and the entrances of the rooms were thronged with people, a motley crowd, in which elegantly dressed women stood side by side with second-hand dealers in shabby coats.

On the ground floor are the rooms for current sales—narrow and badly lighted, and full of a low set of customers. Here hang the clothes, and here are displayed the goods of such unfortunate persons as have not succeeded in paying their rents.

Savinien, who had never entered the place before, thought that his friend wished to go in this direction, so he walked on without being told of his mistake by George. Approaching an open door, he suddenly

beheld a curious spectacle. A sale of cast-off objects of all kinds was taking place—mattresses, saucepans, worn-out muffs, hideous clocks, French cashmeres, and musical instruments. An auctioneer, with a secretary beside him, announced the objects in due order, with a weary air, and the crier made the wildest efforts to effect a sale. Women who sold second-hand clothes were handling shawls and dresses; others who sold second-hand furniture were feeling the mattresses; and peasants from Auvergne were turning over saucepans.

"What!" exclaimed the viscount, turning round to George, "do you really intend buying your bedding and kitchen furniture here?"

"No," replied Fougeray, much amused by Savinien's consternation. "I thought that you were probably thinking of furnishing an establishment for yourself, and I let you go in. You are always talking about economy, and in this part of the building you will be able to find all you want to begin housekeeping with at a low price. But come upstairs, my dear boy, and you will see what a real sale is, and what furniture I have my eye on for my rooms in the Rue Scribe."

With this he took the viscount's arm to lead him up the stairs to the first floor. "Do you know," said he, "that it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to buy some furniture too. You will remain here six months, and it would be very tiresome for you to stay all the while at a hotel. You could not receive anybody; no stylish women would call where you are."

Savinien need only have said a word to undeceive him, but he neither cared nor wished to tell him of his adventure with Madame Montauron. "In the first place," said he, laughing, "I don't expect any calls from ladies. And, besides," he added, "you talk of impossibilities; a set of furniture for a bachelor's apartment would cost me five or six thousand francs."

"You had better say ten or twelve."

"Well! where should I find that amount? You Parisians have a strange way of talking. Want of money is no obstacle to you. Why even Monsieur Montauron, insists upon letting me a flat in a house of his in the Rue Rembrandt."

"You really mean it? Didn't you accept?"

"No, indeed!"

"You were wrong. Six months' rent there would be less than your room and parlour at twelve francs a day in a hotel, and you would, besides, have the pleasure of being near Monsieur Montauron and his wife."

"You may be right; but what should I do without any furniture? Do you expect me to sleep on the floor?"

"Let us say no more, then, you obstinate native of Brittany," responded George Fougeray.

He said no more, but he reflected. He had a plan, which he took care not to allow his friend to guess, but which he resolved to carry out at once. Sales were going on in two rooms on the first floor. The first one was full, but not with the same class of customers as had been seen below. There were few women, but a number of shabby old men who were passing pictures from one to another. Here and there a well-dressed man was perceivable, some lover of art who had come to buy a picture, and was waiting till it was laid on the table.

"Do you hear?" said George Fougeray, in a jeering tone. "The crier is putting up a portrait attributed to Vandyke for six francs. That is really very cheap. Let us look at it."

And with this he urged on his friend Savinien, who would certainly have resisted, if, on glancing towards the enclosure reserved for the auctioneer, the crier, and special purchasers, he had not caught sight of a man who fixed his attention at once. He seemed to be the depositor whom Anaulis had already met in the vaults of the Provincial Bank. He was standing near the desk at which the auctioneer was seated, and he looked disdainfully at the swarm of unimportant purchasers who were crowding about the long table, upon which the crier was displaying the picture attributed to Vandyke.

The man in question did not wear any furs, like the traveller whom Savinien had seen leaving the hotel, but he had a black beard, sunken eyes, and a nose like a falcon's beak—indeed, exactly like that of the Swedish nobleman. Savinien still had some doubts, however, the change of dress causing his hesitation. But George suddenly exclaimed:

"There! Do you see? There's Count Aparanda, the man who will be beside you at table at the club dinner to-night."

"What! Is that he?"

"Himself. I never saw him but once, but it would not be easy to mistake him. I didn't expect to meet him this afternoon, but there is really nothing surprising in his being here. He has just come to Paris, and wishes to make his rooms presentable. It is quite natural that he should buy some pictures. If he runs up the Vandyke, however, he will be taken in, poor Scandinavian! It is worth exactly twelve francs, frame included."

"It is true, then, that he is going to stay in France?" murmured Savinien.

"So it is said. What does it matter to you?"

"Nothing at all, but I thought——"

"What?"

The viscount did not reply. He perceived that he had said too much already.

"You are decidedly much more interested in this man, my dear boy, than you admit," remarked Fougerey.

"I don't know him. I told you so before."

"Well, you will become acquainted with each other this evening. His backers assured me that he was very agreeable and very rich, which does no harm. He speaks French as though he had been born in the Rue Vivienne, and proposes giving entertainments, to which he will invite all Paris. It appears that he has brought an immense amount of money from Sweden."

Savinien was lost in thought.

"I know where that enormous sum is placed," said he to himself. "It lies in the chest in the vaults of the Provincial Bank."

"There, now!" said George, "the Vandyke is sold for twenty-two francs. What a loss for the Louvre Museum! Now they are taking down two huge canvasses depicting hunting scenes—more or less authentic Snyders—very decorative for a dining-room. I imagine that the Swede is going to make himself a present of them—we shall see them closer when he gives his dinners, and he will give some, and invite us to them, my friend, I rely on that."

"You may go if it amuses you. As for me, I shall not."

"What a barbarian you are! As soon as one talks of enjoyment you bristle up like a hedgehog. You will get over it, however, later on."

"I don't think that I shall. I hope we are not going to stay here for ever. You didn't intend buying any pictures, did you?"

"No. I have no intention of forming a gallery, and when my means will admit of my having one, I shan't go in for the 'old masters.' There are too many sham Dutch paintings and false Titians. There are many excellent things to be had, however, in modern pictures, and buying them is a good investment. Corot's pictures which could be bought at a hundred louis, ten years ago, are now sold easily for twenty thousand francs a piece."

"Do you only care for pictures for what they bring?" asked Savinien, shrugging his shoulders.

"I like to invest my money to good advantage, if you please. But I am losing my time, and Jeannine's furniture must be almost sold. You have seen enough of Count Aparanda, have you not?"

"Too much."

"Then let us pass on to the next room. I don't wish to miss the Louis XIII. bed, the Louis XIV. arm-chairs, and the Louis XVI. clock."

"All the reigns, as it were. Who is Jeannine—a furniture-dealer?"

"No, she is a young actress who was greatly in fashion before the last war, and who has lost everything after many ups and downs. Her ninth set of furniture is going to-day, and as she had some very handsome things, I wish to profit by the opportunity to buy a few of them."

Savinien followed George into an immense room which they could scarcely enter, so great was the crowd there. However, all the people there had not come for the purpose of buying. There were several poor devils perched upon some steps where it cost nothing to sit, and some female friends of Jeannine who had put in an appearance less to see than to be seen.

Still, serious purchasers were not wanting. The sale had been well advertised for a month past, and had brought together a number of dealers and connoisseurs of artistic objects. It had only just begun and would last two days. Curtains and carpets were hung up round the walls of the room; chairs of carved walnut, buffets of old oak, and Renaissance cabinets piled up, one upon another, formed impassable barricades. Savinien asked himself whether in a two days' sale all this quantity of stylish furniture would find purchasers. He soon found out, however, that auctions proceed very rapidly. The objects to be sold were, in turn, carefully displayed on the table, at which sat numerous dealers who had an understanding between themselves. Dresses and bedding were now being sold. Everything had been valued beforehand, and as each dealer took care not to oppose his fellows, each lot was bid for but once. Bad luck would have befallen any outsider who attempted to buy. The black band would at once have coalesced to make the purchase run up to two or three times its value.

"Good," muttered George, who took in the situation at a glance, "they haven't come to the important knocking-down yet—I am in time."

"How will you bid in the midst of this din?" asked Savinien, who began to be interested in the singular sight.

"Don't be alarmed, we shan't stay where we are. I am known here, and the private doors open for me. Do you see over there a reserved corner beside the desk at which the auctioneer sits?"

"Yes, but it is as much crowded as the rest of the room, that reserved corner of yours."



"Oh, no! room will be made for us. It is full of acquaintances of mine. Come with me. We have only to pass along the corridor."

Savinien complied, and when they were out of the room, George said to him: "It is a great pity that you decided not to take the rooms which Montauron offered you. You would find furniture here to-day at a bargain."

"You must be joking. I wouldn't spend my money at this woman's sale. I don't want canopied beds and Gobelin tapestry."

"I know people much poorer than you are, who don't deprive themselves of things as useless. But you have not seen all. Jeannine had any amount of room in her house, and did things on a great scale, when she was rich, as she always aimed at originality. She lived in the Rue Joffroy, near the Avenue de Villiers, in the same style as if she had been in a château. I saw yesterday, at the exhibition in this room, a wonderfully handsome set of furniture for a bachelor's apartment, which will not sell very high, I'll venture to say. It is too artistic to please plain people, and it would be exactly what you require."

"Thank you. Why don't you buy it for yourself if it is such a bargain?"

"I don't require it. My present first floor is full, and in my new apartments I have but one room more. But you need furniture for a bedroom, a dressing room, a smoking gallery, and a dining room. All that is here, and in perfect taste; but you can't see the furniture now, owing to all the tables and lounges which are piled up. However, I will show you the choice articles presently, and I am sure you will like them."

"I have no doubt of it; but I repeat that I am not in a position to meet foolish expenses."

"It wouldn't be foolish, and you will regret it if you miss the chance."

"Good morning, my children," said a merry ringing feminine voice behind the two friends. "You've come to get a last reminder of poor Jeannine, haven't you; the least little trifle in the world, an English washing-basin, or a rice-powder box?"

"What! Anita!" exclaimed George, turning towards her. "It is heaven that sends you."

"No, it was Mariette Charlier, who wants to buy a pair of old Dresden candlesticks, and asked me to come in her place, as she has the headache. I say, viscount, it isn't very polite on your part not to bid me good-morning," she resumed, addressing Savinien. "Come, one little smile, or I shall be angry!"

"Savinien will give you a dozen smiles, each of them more amiable than its fellows," said George, "but I wish to speak to you alone a moment. I have a service to ask of you, divine madcap."

"Come! come!" replied the pretty actress, who had formed one of the party with which Savinien d'Amaulis had supped on the evening of his arrival in Paris. She now stepped back, pulling George after her.

Savinien did not know which way to look during the "aside" between George Fougeray and this girl, who had burst in upon their conversation without caring whether she disturbed them or not.

She was really very pretty; she was even beautiful, and her style of beauty was individual in its character. She was a black-eyed blonde, a blonde with light brown hair which, when let down, covered her like a cloak. Her skin was of admirable whiteness and delicacy. Her lips, somewhat too full, were flexible, and readily displayed her teeth, which, without flattery, might have been compared to double rows of pearls.

She had been born in a circus on the Place du Trône, on the opening day of the great gingerbread fair. Brought up among strolling players and acrobats, she had first tried the boards in the provinces, and of late times she had obtained an engagement at the "Variétés" in Paris, soon acquiring great notoriety. A real flower of the woods, she had soon become accustomed to the temperature of the Parisian hot-house. She knew all the Parisians who are acquainted with women of her profession, and the fine gentlemen who would not have looked at her when she was dragging herself with her boots in holes along the Boulevard Saint-Michel, now felt highly honoured when invited to dine or dance at her house. For when Anita was not on the stage she received and gave balls. The hot-house to which she had been transplanted was a handsome mansion, with a court-yard and garden, on the Boulevard Malesherbes, and it belonged to her and was unmortgaged. In spite of her possessions, however, she had remained good-natured and independent. There was a kind of Bohemianism about her which did not do her any harm in the eyes of her admirers. She amused herself with the young, and pleased the old on account of her independent spirit. George Fougerey, who knew life, prophesied that she would end as she had begun, in poverty. She had a mania for sudden fancies like many women who unexpectedly attain to fortune.

Savinien did justice to all her charms, greatly admiring her peculiar beauty, laughing at her whimsical talk, and even making no objection as to the conspicuous oddity of her dress. He liked her because she was not commonplace, but she frightened him; he was almost afraid of her. She seemed to him like a young panther, with its claws drawn in, and gambling about upon a carpet for its master's amusement, until it has an opportunity to fly at his throat and strangle him.

The supper, which she had enlivened by her presence, had charmed the viscount on the day of his arrival from Brittany, but he did not wish to see her again, and already regretted having come to the Hôtel des Ventres, as he now encountered her there. It was not without some anxiety that he tried to conjecture what George Fougerey could have to say so privately to this princess of the footlights.

Their talk did not last long. After three minutes' chat in a low tone, interspersed with frequent bursts of smothered laughter, Anita finally said: "All right, Fougerey. I didn't know this species; it will amuse me, and give me good practice."

"What are they talking about, and what have they agreed upon?" thought Savinien, who was quite puzzled.

"My little viscount," said the black-eyed blonde, "you are not polite. You promised to call on me, but I think I should have had to wait a long time for you if I had not met you here, and had a chance of telling you my mind. Fougerey promised to bring you; but he is a trickster, and, besides, when I want to have a thing done, I do it myself. Now, I want to show you my house, and I declare to you that if you do not come to see it in the course of the next twenty-four hours, I shall be your implacable enemy."

Savinien began trying to find a polite excuse, but Fougerey did not give him time to articulate it. "Anita, my girl," said he, "this is not the time for fine phrases; while you are making soft speeches to a gentleman who is by no means a bear, the Louis XVI. clock, which I have taken a fancy to, is perhaps being sold."

"Or the old Dresden candlesticks that Mariette asked me to buy for her," exclaimed the girl. "Let us go in at once, my children. Come, Fougeray, what are you waiting for? Knock at the door."

Fougeray knocked, and a clerk opened the portal. In order to be admitted by this side entrance, it was necessary to take the proper measures; but George and Anita were in the habit of coming to sales at this place, and the clerk knew them. He let them in, as well as the Viscount d'Amaulis, and they all found themselves in an apartment which communicated by an open door with the sale-room, and in which the furniture already sold was piled up ready to be carted away by attendants, and duly ticketed with the names of the purchasers.

Anita, who entered the first, did not remain there, and when she appeared on the threshold of the auction-room before the public there assembled, her entrance created some sensation. She nodded in response to the bows of some gentlemen who knew her; the auctioneer smiled in his most affable manner, and the crier brought forward a chair. It was easy to see that she was quite at home.

George went to whisper a word to the auctioneer, and Savinien took up a position behind the chair occupied by the fair Anita. He would have been only too glad to get away. All these people staring at him embarrassed him greatly, and he was ashamed to be thought the attendant escort of his neighbour Anita.

The imprudent viscount was not yet at the end of his annoyances. Anita turned round to him, pulled his sleeve, and when he had, perforce, bent his head to listen to her, she said in a low voice: "Will you do me a little service?" Then, seeing that he reddened, she added: "Oh, it is nothing very difficult. You need only repeat, with your eyes on the auctioneer, the words that I will give you."

"I don't understand what you mean," stammered Savinien.

"This is it, my dear fellow. I want to buy a set of furniture which is about to be sold; it is for one of my friends who isn't in Paris just now, and I don't wish to be seen bidding for it, in the first place, because the dealers over there would put their heads together to run it up, and besides, they know that nothing stops me when I take a notion to anything; but with you, who are not known, they won't go so far. This is why, if you will be so obliging, we will organise a private telegraph between ourselves."

"But it seems to me that George could do this much better than I could."

"Oh! Fougeray is in the same plight as myself, too well-known by the dealers. I'll bet that he will ask you to do the same thing when the Louis XVI. clock, which he wants to buy, is put up. You will save him and me a few thousand francs; besides, what more can you desire. Shan't I be looking at you in the most engaging manner for a quarter of an hour at the least?"

Anita strengthened her arguments by a most languishing look, which conquered the viscount's scruples. She turned half-way round on her chair so as to face Savinien, and began looking fixedly at him like a corporal examining a soldier. Fougeray had already finished his chat with the auctioneer, and was now talking to an expert whom he was questioning, probably as to the authenticity of the famous clock.

"Gentlemen," said the auctioneer, raising his voice to command attention, "we are about to offer a complete set of furniture for a suite of four rooms, including a dining-room. It is a set suited for a bachelor. It is

unnecessary to speak of the pieces in detail, they have been seen at the show, and there has been a request made that they should be put together. If the bidding is not high enough, I will separate them ; but I shall first try to sell them in one lot ; the room is crowded and it is late. I now begin, gentlemen ! The complete lot, a set of artistic furniture, as good as new, observe ! There is a buyer at six thousand."

There came a spell of silence. The dealers were talking low together.

"Six thousand five hundred," said a deep bass voice which made Savinien start without knowing why.

The bidding started by this powerful voice came from a group in the middle of the room, and Savinien could not see who it was who offered this price.

"Say seven thousand," said the black-eyed blonde to him, without turning towards the crowd, "I know what furniture it is ; it is worth double the amount."

Savinien hesitated. He thought that the pretty woman was trying to make him play the fool. But a tender, almost imploring, look induced him to make up his mind.

"Seven thousand !" said the viscount, with an effort.

George, who was not far off, smiled at him encouragingly.

"It's all right, then," said Savinien to himself. "He approves of what I am doing. He sees that I am bidding for this lady, for he knows very well that I don't wish to buy."

"Gentlemen," said the auctioneer, "we say seven thousand, and we shall not stop there."

"Now, my dear viscount," said Anita, softly, "not a word, pray. Only look at the auctioneer to repeat the signs I make to you."

"Seven thousand on my left," cried the clerk. "Let us make haste, gentlemen !"

"Seven thousand five hundred !" thundered the bass voice.

"Your turn, viscount, imitate me," muttered the lady, throwing her head back.

This vertical motion is equivalent to an assent in all civilised countries, and especially at the Paris auction rooms, where the language of signs is greatly resorted to and perfectly well understood. Viscount d'Amaulis had gone too far already to draw back, so he correctly imitated Anita's telegraphing, and the auctioneer immediately took up the bid, exclaiming: "Eight thousand ! Eight thousand on the left ! See, gentlemen ! This figure is only half the value of the lot, the upholsterer received twenty thousand for the goods, which are quite new. Ah ! eight thousand five hundred there in front of me !"

No one had spoken. The bass voice was heard no more. The other competitor had probably decided to resort to signs. Savinien did not see him, but auctioneers have lynx-like eyes, and the one directing this sale had not hesitated a second in announcing a fresh offer. When the struggle is silent, it is understood that every sign represents a bid equal to the preceding one, until it pleases one of the bidders to speak again to modify the figure more or less. While waiting for something better, the bidding for the set of bachelor's furniture went on at the rate of five hundred francs each bid.

The blonde did not seem disposed to stop at this. She continued looking at the viscount and nodding her pretty head, and the viscount repeated the gesture. The auctioneer, attentive and rapid, turned from left to

right to note each sign made by the two adversaries. And from his desk he continued crying out:

"Nine thousand!"

"Nine thousand five hundred!"

"Ten thousand!"

"Ten thousand five hundred!"

"Eleven thousand!"

At this last figure from Savinien there was a pause. The other competitor evidently reflected before pushing on. He suspected that he was bidding against a man determined to hold out, and he was afraid that he would be led too far.

"Perfect!" said Anita, in a low tone. "He will let go. If nobody else interferes you will make a good bargain."

"That is, *you* will have made one."

"Silence, and attend to the auctioneer! He knows how to handle the hammer."

"Yes; he brandishes it as though he were trying to brain some one."

"Good! he will be a minute or two now in getting ready to knock down the lot. I know his method."

Every auctioneer has a method, and there are ten different ways of handling the ebony stick, tipped with a little ivory knob. Some hold it out and shake it in a threatening way; others scarcely touch it, and wave it softly a couple of inches above the table. But whatever the method, the hammer is the sword of Damocles above the head of determined buyers. They never lose sight of it; they tremble lest it should fall on an adverse bid, and each wave of the auctioneer's hand determines them to make a fresh sacrifice.

"Eleven thousand! gentlemen," cried the auctioneer, rising to show that the end was near. "We say: eleven thousand! That isn't enough; but time is passing, and I am going to knock the lot down. Come, there, at the end of the table, what do you say?"

This apostrophe was addressed to the clan of dealers who had taken no part in the battle. They thought it amusing to see two men bidding against one another, and hoped that the furniture would be handed over to one of the antagonists for double its value, without interference from them. But as the combatants' ardour diminished, one of the party took upon himself to set it going again.

"Eleven thousand two hundred!" said the dealer.

"Eleven thousand two hundred!" triumphantly repeated the clerk. "You, sir, in front there!"

The gentleman in front said nothing. He was, no doubt, more experienced than Viscount d'Amaulis in the tricks of the trade, and was mistrustful. But at last, after a few seconds of silence, the bass voice was heard again: "Twelve thousand!"

This imposing sum was duly proclaimed, and then commented upon as follows by the auctioneer:—"We are getting near, gentlemen! This lot would be cheap at fifteen thousand. One more bid, and I knock it down."

Savinien, who was beginning to be amused by these manœuvres, looked at the fair Anita to see what she wished, and she, before replying, turned her head towards the auctioneer. She had seen him preside before and knew at a glance that he was about to wind up. George Fougeray, who had remained standing beside the desk, said a few words to him, The hammer came down by slow degrees,

"Make haste, gentlemen! Is it decided? Do you hear? One!—two!"

"Say thirteen thousand, it is quite worth that," whispered the blonde.

The viscount repeated the amount, and his voice was lost in the noise of an altercation which had arisen in the hall between two loafers such as almost always occupy conspicuous places at large sales. But the auctioneer heard Savinien clearly enough. "For the third and last time, gentlemen, does no one bid any higher? Come, gentlemen, say the word!"

There was a short pause. The dealer who had bid before had got into a wrangle with a Philistine who was standing in his way, and the word did not come. So the hammer fell with a sharp sound.

"Knocked down at thirteen thousand francs, the entire lot!"

This official sentence was heard above the noise, and gave rise to an unexpected objection.

"Excuse me! twelve thousand," said the deep bass voice.

"Thirteen thousand—to this gentleman," said the auctioneer, pointing to Savinien.

"No! no! there's a mistake."

"I appeal to all here! The gentleman on the left had the last word."

"Yes! yes! we all heard it!" cried the group round Anita.

The public always sides with pretty women, and the public believed that it was the lady who had purchased the goods through the instrumentality of her attendant swain. However, the gentleman with the deep voice did not seem satisfied, and at the same time he elbowed his way through the crowd.

"Come, sir," said the auctioneer, gravely, "I beg of you don't disturb the sale. The lot is sold, and there can be no discussion on the matter." Then turning to his crier, he added: "Put up the old tapestries. Look at them, gentlemen, they are those at the end of the hall on the right."

Savinien had no thought of looking at them. He had just seen that his recent rival was Count Aparanda and could not believe his senses. But there was no possibility of a mistake. It was the same man who had been a few minutes before in the picture-room, and whom George Fougerey had pointed out to him. He had taken a place near the long table which served for displaying the objects sold, and was now but a few steps from Savinien and Anita, seemingly disposed to renew his protest as to the fairness of the sale. But the criers made as much noise as they could in announcing the superb sixteenth century tapestry; bidding was going on in all directions, and the auctioneer was conducting it very rapidly, without taking any more notice of Count Aparanda than if that nobleman had been still in the uttermost parts of Sweden. George glanced aside at him and looked at Savinien, as if to say that he had played him a clever trick. At this moment the viscount observed the auctioneer's secretary making signs for him to approach the desk, and as he did not appear to know the meaning of this, Anita undertook to tell him. "He is asking for your name and address," whispered she.

"Why?" said Savinien, with surprise.

"He must know whom those things have been sold to."

"But, madame, he sold them to you. I thought these people knew you."

"No matter. Give him your card," replied Anita, suppressing a strong inclination to laugh. "No, never mind," she added, "it is unnecessary. Your friend Fougerey is answering for you." And, indeed, George was talking with the clerk, who took down a memorandum at his dictation.

The viscount, quite at sea, and giving up all attempt to understand the meaning of this, began once more examining Count Aparanda, and perceived that the fiery foreigner had grown perceptibly calmer. He no longer looked at the auctioneer in a rage, but, on the contrary, devoured the fair Anita with his eyes, her face being now turned towards the crowd. She observed this conduct on his part, and said to Savinien: "Do look! the twelve thousand man is staring at me to console himself for losing the furniture! He won't succeed any better with me than he did with the bidding. Do you know who he is? He has a face fit to scare a child. He looks like an ogre."

"George knows him, I believe," muttered the viscount, who had his own reasons for keeping silent as to the Swede.

"Good! he will tell me, then. I shouldn't be sorry to know the name of the personage of whom I have made a conquest; for he is conquered—that's easy to see. The lightning has struck him. I sometimes produce this effect. Unfortunately, the lightning never falls upon the person whom I wish to strike," added the actress, flashing an incendiary glance at Yvonne's cousin.

George Fougeray now drew near. "My little ones," said he, before Anita was able to question him, "it seems to me that we have no more time to lose, and that the moment has come for us to go."

"Never! Mariette Charlier asked me to buy her——"

"Two old Dresden candlesticks over there on the shelf, next to my Louis XVI. clock! I know that, but the clerk told me just now that these things are reserved for to-morrow's sale. We shall be obliged to return, my dear. So much the more reason for going off now. It is stifling here, and we are breathing bad air."

"Oh, I don't care to remain! But tell me the name of that man with the beard, who is staring at me—there, in front of us—on the other side of the table. D'Amaulis says that you know him."

"So does he, for that matter, and he had no need to refer you to me. He is Count Aparanda, an immensely wealthy Swede, who has come to live in Paris, and is just furnishing his house. He was buying pictures just now in the next room, and if I hadn't whispered a few words to the auctioneer he would have secured all that furniture. But we cut the grass from under his feet. I will apologise this evening to him."

"Where will you see him?" eagerly asked Anita.

"At my club. He was elected a member yesterday, and dines there to-day. I shall be introduced to him, and then I shall introduce Savinien."

"And you must introduce him to me some day. He is ugly, but he has a head full of character. He would be superb as Fra Diavolo."

"Do you wish to play comic opera with him? Ah! he is coming behind the scenes already. Let us go."

Anita, this time, did not need coaxing to raise the siege. She took the route by which she had come, and Savinien willingly followed her. He had had quite enough of the noise of the auction, and was anxious to clear up certain obscure matters. For the moment he thought no more of Count Aparanda. He had seen with satisfaction that the mysterious stranger paid no attention to him, which was quite natural, as they had found themselves face to face but once before at the door of the vaults of the Provincial Bank. They had but passed each other then, and the Swede had certainly paid no attention to the depositor coming next to him. However, the viscount had certain explanations to ask of George Fougeray

and of the fair Anita, who had just used and abused the courteous politeness of a gentleman from Brittany.

When they found themselves all three in the large vestibule of the first floor, the actress struck an attitude in front of Savinien, and said to him, with a peal of laughter: "You don't bear malice, viscount, do you?"

"What for?" asked Savinien, who did not expect this sally.

"Why, for having made you buy some furniture in spite of yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"What! didn't you guess that the bachelor's furniture is yours?"

"Excuse me, madame; you asked me to buy it, and I bought it for you, and it was only to oblige you that I consented to repeat your bids."

"What, really! You actually thought—but it's too funny! What should I do with a set of furniture for a bachelor! Do you suppose that I wish to make a present of it to one of my friends. That would be turning the world upside down, my dear sir! I do not make presents; I receive them."

"But, madame, I did not authorise you——"

"To buy for you. That may be; but the thing is done, and there is no getting out of it. Besides, what are you complaining of? Thanks to me, you have, for thirteen thousand francs, a set of furniture which is worth twenty thousand."

"No matter. I do not want it, and I will not pay for it."

"Are you so close as all that? You will destroy all my illusions as to viscounts from Brittany."

"I repeat, madame, that I bought nothing and will pay for nothing," said Savinien, angrily.

"Then I must," replied the lady. "Fie! for shame! a gentleman does not behave like that!"

Yvonne's cousin was about to say something extremely rude, when George interfered. "Reason a moment instead of getting angry," said he, quietly. "I was wrong as well as Anita. I thought that you had decided to follow my advice, and to profit by an excellent occasion for furnishing your rooms at an inexpensive rate. I just now gave your name to the clerk with your address. He will send you the bill to-morrow."

"And I will send him to the devil!"

"If you did that, my dear friend, we should pass for two badly-behaved fellows. Don't tell me that you care nothing for that. The opinion of the clerk and the auctioneer may be indifferent to you; but there are people in the hall who heard you bid—people belonging to our club—not to mention that Count Aparanda, who interests you so much, and who must be enraged with you for beating him in getting hold of the set of furniture."

Savinien started. Fougeray had hit the right nail on the head.

"Let the viscount alone," said Anita, scornfully. "If he persists in refusing, I will take the matter upon myself. It will cost me a few thousand francs, but we shall not quarrel."

This was too much. Viscount d'Amaulis, touched in his self-love, replied:

"No, madame, it shall not cost you anything. I will pay for the furniture which you have chosen to make me buy. I will bear the expense of a joke, which, you will allow me to say, was in very bad taste. But, as for keeping the furniture and using it, that is another matter."

"Why the mischief do you bother yourself about such a thing as



that?" exclaimed George, catching the ball on the rebound. "Why don't you send it to the rooms that Montauron proposed to you in the Rue Rembrandt?"

"Four rooms on the ground-floor, between court and garden, at three thousand francs a year—that is a chance that you will not have again, viscount," said a person who had heard Fougeray's last words, and whom Savinien was far from expecting to see.

"What! Bouret!" exclaimed Anita. "You are everywhere, great financier!"

"Wherever there are pretty women. Yes, princess." And turning to Savinien: "My dear viscount, Montauron talked a long time about you to me this morning; he is longing to have you take his rooms, and I should by all means do so if I were in your place. Good day, Fougeray," added M. Bouret, without giving Savinien time to reply, "I'll lay a wager that you came to buy the Louis XVI. clock? It was the only really authentic thing in Jeannine's house."

"It will not be sold till to-morrow," said George.

"I don't care. I don't want it. I came here in passing by, and I am glad that I did, as I meet you all three. What did you buy at the auction, fair Anita?"

"Nothing at all; but I was very nearly being fleeced to the tune of thirteen thousand francs."

"Bah! Tell me all about it."

"She is only bragging," said Fougeray, quickly, well knowing how Anita was apt to talk when she chose. "My friend D'Amaulis," added Fougeray, "has just had a complete set knocked down to him, which seems as though it had been made on purpose for the rooms which your partner proposes to let to him."

"Then I had better write to Montauron that you will take them, eh! viscount?"

"I have not made up my mind," stammered Savinien, who did not know how to answer all these people, who seemed to have combined their energies to make him take and furnish these rooms.

"I vow that you will find nothing better, and, besides, you will greatly annoy Montauron if you refuse; his wife told me so this morning," added M. Bouret. "They both are anxious to have you for a neighbour."

"So am I," said Anita, who had recovered her temper. "Don't forget, viscount, that I live in the Avenue Mallesherbes, two steps from the Parc Monceau."

"Very well, my beauty!" exclaimed Bouret, "help us to convince Monsieur d'Amaulis that he cannot possibly stay so long at a hotel. Come, viscount, what objections have you to my dear director's plan? Do you dislike the neighbourhood?"

"Young man, if you say that you do it will scarcely be polite to me—or to Madame Montauron, either," added Anita, laughing.

"The neighbourhood pleases me very much, on the contrary."

"And so will the rooms. They are charming and so convenient! There are two entrances and secret doors as well. It is exactly as though Montauron had built the place to suit some Don Juan, and you have furniture, too, as you have just bought some. If it is the trouble of moving in that you dread, and having to attend to it yourself, do not let that disturb you. I will write to my upholsterer; he will do everything, and in three days you can be in the Rue Rembrandt. It is settled, is it not?"

"You will only have to pay the auctioneer," added George.

"And that won't trouble you," resumed M. Bouret, with a laugh. "When a man has made a hundred thousand francs he can easily gratify his little fancies. Fougeray gave you good advice. Last evening at the Ladies' Exchange the women were all talking about your neat hit. It may really be called a masterly stroke."

"What!" exclaimed the viscount, flushing to his ears, "everybody knows it?"

"Don't be surprised at that. Galipot told the tale from the house-tops. But it is only complimentary to you and Fougeray to have succeeded in so brilliant a manner. You are known now as being able to foresee things, and being both bold and lucky. Besides, it is delightful to be able to put some money on one side even if one does not need it. Ask your friend if it isn't."

"What, Fougeray!" exclaimed the actress, "you make a hundred thousand francs and you don't let me know? It is not pretty behaviour to keep such things from your friends. Whenever it happens again let me know by post."

And as Savinien looked disgusted, the crazy creature resumed, laughing in his face: "Don't be alarmed, I have no intention of borrowing *your* hundred thousand francs. But I must say, that if you don't take rooms and furnish them after such a lift you must be a perfect miser."

The viscount restrained himself from setting the impertinent woman in her place, and giving her a lesson in good behaviour in the presence of witnesses, and felt the more angry from feeling that what she said was true.

"Look there!" said George in a low tone, to divert his attention, "there goes our Swede!"

Savinien turned quickly, and saw Count Aparanda directing himself toward a hall in which there was an exhibition of *fäience*, china, and other art-pottery.

"This nobleman is certainly a good customer for the auctioneers," resumed Fougeray, "he goes from pictures to furniture, and from furniture to——"

"Do you believe that?" interrupted the blonde. "Didn't you just see how he stared at me? He doesn't care three straws for those plates. It was to see me that he came here. I'll bet anything that he won't go into that room there!"

"You lose, my dear friend, for he is there already. But I confess that he devoured you with his eyes as he passed by."

"Where the deuce have I seen that face before?" muttered M. Bouret. "Ah! I remember now, and Monsieur d'Amaulis must remember also. It was that chap who was in our vaults when I took you to them. Is it not the same man, viscount?"

"I think so," stammered Savinien.

"That reminds me that I forgot to ask the head clerk his name, which he knows, as he gave him his card. You wanted to know it, did you not?"

"We all know it now," said George, "and we dine with him this evening."

"Indeed! but then——"

"We know his name, but not him, and he doesn't know us. We dine with him at the club."

"Ah, indeed! What club do you belong to?"

"The Plungers' Club."

"Ah! yes, I know! It seems they play a stiff game there. If you are as lucky at baccarat as on 'Change you will soon be millionaires, both of you. I hope that you will win all that that gentleman has in the chest which he deposited at the Provincial Bank. Imagine, my dear fellow, his bringing us a chest which looked as though it weighed two hundred pounds! A porter had charge of it. If it is full of bullion, its owner will be able to play a high game."

"Till we manage to clean him out!" laughed George.

For half an hour Savinien had been on red hot coals. Everything combined to throw him into a fever of anxiety, and it seemed as though all the people he met had conspired to bring to his mind what he so particularly wanted to forget—his unwhished-for success at the Bourse, the adventure with Madame Montauron, and the visit to the vaults where the steel casket belonging to that lady, and the mysterious stranger's wooden chest, were placed. Bouret was always alluding to this last matter as though he took a pleasure in annoying Viscount d'Amaulias, who was beginning to realise that he was not strong enough to struggle against the difficulties in which chance had placed him. All Paris now knew that he had made two hundred thousand francs in company with George Fougeray, and he was no longer able of his own will to avoid relations with Madame Montauron or Count Aparanda, whom he would willingly have met no more. His patience failed him in this contest against fate, which seemed to force him into situations which he himself did not create, and he suddenly resolved to plunge into the furnace. He did as generals do when, after at first refusing to give battle, they fight fiercely on seeing that they cannot do otherwise.

"Sir," said he, suddenly, to M. Bouret, "will you be kind enough to tell Monsieur Montauron that I accept his offer?"

"Certainly. I shall see him this evening. My upholsterer will take charge of the furniture which you have just bought, and before the end of the week you will be comfortably settled."

"This is as it should be!" exclaimed George, "at last you have made up your mind."

"Yes, to everything," replied Savinien, drily. "I shall dine at the club this evening, and to prove it, I will now leave you and go and dress. Call for me at a quarter to seven. I must see you without fail, as we have an account to settle." And without stopping for ceremony which he judged superfluous, Yvonne's cousin rushed down the stairs and out of the door.

"Ah!" said he, setting his teeth, "they plot together to compel me to keep this money, and to live their life, which I despise and loathe! Well, I will keep the cash, but only to squander it, and I hope that it will not last long. I will go and live in the rooms which Monsieur Montauron wishes to let to me, but I will only stay there long enough to save his wife, and when I tell the imprudent woman what I know about Count Aparanda, when I have succeeded in giving her back the casket which she thrust upon me, then, and no later, I will fly to Plouër, and I will never leave it again. I have had a surfeit of bankers, brokers, guilty wives, Swedish adventurers, and actresses who treat everybody with the utmost familiarity. Let them worship the Golden Pig if they like! I shall be content to worship my cousin."

## V.

"MONEY does not create happiness" is an old saying, the accuracy of which is much disputed by poor folks, who have never been able to find out its truth.

The rich all think that this specimen of proverbial precept is correct, and that it does not suffice to possess millions to feel glad at heart, but this does not prove that they would like to be poor, or care to rush to ruin. Those who have never known poverty often form a poetic idea of it, and dream of the sweetness of a Bohemian life, just as, seated at a good fire, one might think of the charms of an excursion to the North Pole. But when such a life has of necessity been led, its bitterness, its constant struggle against privation of all kinds, while waiting for success, deprive one of any illusion as to its charms or any desire to repeat the experiment. It may be remembered with pleasure mingled with pride, like a soldier, who, having won his epaulets, remembers the sufferings and dangers of the hard campaign which brought him his superior rank, but this does not prove that he would care to go over the same ground again.

Age and care come at the same time as fortune; youth and gaiety have vanished as well as adversity, and will not return, although evil days may do so. The future has become narrower, the horizon has clouded. The opposite side of pleasure is most obvious, and the nothingness of all things most clear.

This was somewhat the case with M. Montauron, although he had a great deal of philosophy in his composition, and no tendency whatever to pessimism. Few men could boast as he might of his luck, and he had not the bad taste to complain of age, or even to assume the attitude of a worn-out man, tired of the world's pleasures. His was not a fretful mind, and besides, he had no time to be melancholy. Idle people can indulge in longings, aspire to unknown felicity, and create imaginary griefs; but a financier, borne along by the current of business, does not amuse himself by analyzing his sensations, or seeking for the cause of what he feels, and no one in all Paris was more absorbed in business than was M. Charles Montauron.

Chairman and managing director of a powerful company, a bold speculator taking part in all great enterprises, he scarcely realised the flight of time, and he lacked the leisure for reflection. For twenty years, since his good luck had set in, he had gone ever onward, urged by the whirlwind which carries with it all men of money; he had obeyed the voice which cries out, "On! on! you must not stop; you cannot pause! You can rest only in the grave!"

Charles Montauron had begun life without money, influence, or connection. What he was he owed it only to himself, to his labour, intelligence, the correctness of his judgment, and also to his rigid integrity in business matters; for he had not waded through the mire in order to succeed, as so many unscrupulous people unhesitatingly do. He had a right, therefore, to enjoy in peace an immense fortune honestly accumulated. But rest to his ardent nature would have been death. He needed the fever of the struggle, the thrilling emotions of the battles decided at the Bourse. After having fought his way from the ranks upward, in order to make a position, and to conquer, he now did battle for the pleasure of fighting.

This financier, however, had a heart; he had loved, and he loved still. He had married for love after making a fortune of three millions of francs, taking to himself, at thirty-five years of age, a wife thirteen years his junior, a young girl who had but fifty thousand francs as her dowry.

At that moment of his life he thought of giving up business, and satisfying himself with a happy life, for he was happy; his wife was charming, and he had not married her for money; she, on her side, was fond of him, and would have accepted him had he been poor. It was she who had induced him to remain in business, not that she was either ambitious or greedy; but because she understood that if he abandoned his calling it would be a sacrifice made to her.

During twelve years of married life the only serious sorrow which they had known had been that of having no children. She had suffered as much as he from this misfortune; but, in time, both had become resigned to it, and had laid down a plan of life. They met at breakfast hours and in the evening. The husband's day was taken up by business; that of the wife by charity. They did not care for what is called society; if M. Montauron gave dinners and received on Fridays, it was because his position obliged him to do so, and he received men only.

Madame Montauron had no other friends than those of her husband, and did not admit any women into her intimacy, although she knew all the wives of the wealthy Parisian bankers, women who possess more diamonds than quarterings of nobility.

It is true that she did not belong to the same class, being the daughter of a ruined nobleman, said to have descended from the dukes of Brittany. Aurélie de Louvigné, an orphan at twenty, had thought of taking the veil in the convent, where she had been educated, when an old friend of the deceased Count de Louvigné took it into his head to effect her marriage on her return from a trip to Italy, where she had gone with an old cousin, her only living relative, who, every year, wintered at Pisa for the benefit of her health. The experiment was not long successful, as she died one month after the wedding of her young charge.

The marriage created no sensation. Montauron was a millionaire of too recent date to be known beyond the limits of a small circle. Aurélie de Louvigné, remaining alone in the world, fled from notoriety as anxiously as others seek it. Thus, few knew the true story of this marriage, or were acquainted with the past life of the husband and the wife. It was only known that their conjugal felicity had been untroubled, and that their tastes were the same, as they both preferred a calm and retired life to the bustle of society. A few people gifted with great penetration, of the class of those who do not judge by appearances, but dive to the depths of things, declared that the happiness of the Montaurons was not without its clouds. They had observed that the husband was jealous, and the wife profoundly melancholy. This jealousy was, doubtless, without cause; the sadness without reason; unless, indeed, the jealousy was retrospective, and the sadness due to bye-gone sources.

However, these observers were few and not ill-disposed, so that society, properly so called, did not busy itself with a couple who gave no cause for remark. Had the walls of the house in the Avenue Ruysdaël been of glass, curious tattlers would have seen nothing there worth the trouble of repeating in those abodes where scandal is enjoyed.

M. Montauron occupied the entire right wing of the house, and only received business people. Madame Montauron remained in her apart-

ments in the left wing and only left them to visit the hot-house, or to ramble about the garden which was very large.

It was only at meal-times that they met upon neutral ground, as it were, in the large dining-room on the ground-floor, and these enforced meetings never took place without witnesses. With married people of small means breakfast and dinner are given up to private talk. The wealthy are condemned, however, to endure the presence of servants. Two tall lackeys served Monsieur and Madame Montauron, who in their presence could only speak of indifferent subjects.

It seldom happened that the husband could give a moment to confidential conversation after the meal; such a chance had occurred, however, on the day when Savinien d'Amaulis paid his first visit to his uncle's banker, and a similar opportunity offered itself on Thursday, the day before the banker's weekly reception. M. Montauron usually went out after leaving his wife, who returned to her rooms, where she had no companion except Brigitte, an old nurse, who had brought her up and had gradually become her confidante and friend.

On this particular evening, however, the banker suggested a stroll in the park, but Madame Montauron, who was afraid of the cool evening air, preferred to seat herself beside him under a verandah overlooking the garden.

They sat alone, motionless and thoughtful. Night was gathering. Their servants were out of hearing, yet for some minutes they had not exchanged a single word.

Madame Montauron, accustomed to this silence on her husband's part, as his mind was always occupied with serious business matters, felt somewhat surprised when he suddenly said to her: "Do you remember, my dear Aurélie, the little house which you lived in at Ville d'Avray with your cousin, Madame de Morvieux?"

"How could I forget it, my dear?" exclaimed Madame Montauron, surprised by this sudden evocation of the past. "Was it not there that I first saw you?"

"Yes," said the banker, gravely, "it was on just such an evening as this. The leaves were sprouting in the woods of Ville d'Avray. You had returned from Italy, and you were still more afraid of the cold than you are now, for you were ill. I can see you as you then looked, pale and sad, leaning on Baron de Trémorin's arm. He endeavoured to coax you to take a turn in the little garden which your cousin had rented, so that your recovery might be hastened. I had just been introduced to you, and the more I admired your charming face the more awkward and embarrassed I became."

"I was much more timid than yourself," said Madame Montauron, smiling, "for I knew why you had come. I knew Monsieur de Trémorin's purpose; my cousin had told me of it, and gave it her full approval. It was a perfect plot to marry us, and you were in it. I must needs yield, being one against three. Six weeks afterwards I was your wife. It is very gallant of you, my dear, to remember all this after twelve years. That evening fixed my destiny."

"It seems to me as though it were yesterday," remarked the husband.

"You do not yet regret, I hope, the determination you took that day?"

"I love you as I loved you then," was the reply. "The heart does not grow old,"

"No, Charles. Everything has changed in these twelve years, excepting my heart. I wish that you could read it. It is full of you, and I often reproach myself with not telling you all its feelings. I dare not, lest you should think me foolish, for, remember, I am growing old."

"It is I who am ridiculous in talking to you of love at my age, and so abruptly. I have passed the entire day thinking of money matters, and I suddenly return to the language of passion, as though I were only twenty years old. Bouret would laugh, if he could hear me."

"I trust that Monsieur Bouret's opinion is a matter of indifference to you?"

"As to questions of feeling, it certainly is. Bouret looks at life differently from me. He only thinks of money and material satisfaction, while I, I declare to you, Aurélie, should be only too happy if I could rid myself of my fetters, by leaving Paris and the whirl of business, to go to live with you in the country. This very evening I was reminded of Ville d'Avray, by seeing Monsieur d'Amaulis."

"Monsieur d'Amaulis?" said Madame Montauron, endeavouring to hide a nervous start. "Excuse me, my dear, if I don't see what connection——"

"Didn't Monsieur de Trémorin arrange our marriage? Monsieur d'Amaulis is the nephew of the man to whom I owe my happiness," interrupted the husband.

"That is true. But I believe that Monsieur d'Amaulis knows nothing about all that."

"No. I don't think that his uncle told him, and I am not much surprised as to the silence he has kept respecting our former relations. The baron is the closest man with regard to personal matters that I am acquainted with. I see that young Savinien d'Amaulis is entirely ignorant of the fact that Monsieur de Trémorin has a large interest in the Provincial Bank, and that he himself has been made a shareholder. His uncle, who manages his property, has made it four times what it was in a few years' time, and has told him nothing about it. The viscount thinks himself quite poor."

"Monsieur de Trémorin probably thought that he might have been led to squander his money."

"Oh, I don't blame him for guarding against that! But I fear that his precautionary measures will not serve to protect the young man. However, on the whole, the baron has acted wisely. Still, I understand nothing of his way of proceeding as to other matters."

"What has he done that you fail to understand?"

"Did you never wonder, my dear, why he has never visited us since our marriage?"

"No, it never occurred to me," stammered Madame Montauron.

"What! didn't you ever think it strange that he has never even called here?"

"He lives in Brittany, his interests keep him there."

"His interests, on the contrary, ought often to bring him to Paris, as the bulk of his fortune is invested here. He has only been here two or three times within twelve years, and what astonishes me is that his first visit should not have been to you."

"I thought that you received him on all of these occasions."

"So I did. He never failed to come to my office in the Avenue de l'Opéra. But each time he came it was just at the moment of closing for

the day, and he never found time to dine here, or set foot here. This, you will admit, Aurélie, was a most singular way of acting. It looks as though he had sworn to avoid you, although he was your father's friend and your cousin's, and took such an affectionate interest in you before your marriage, which was due to him, for, without his intervention, I should probably never have met you. It was he, who taking advantage of our business relations, induced me to go to see Madame de Morvieux. What did he not say of you at the time? A father could not have praised his daughter's good qualities more warmly, and you certainly deserved all that he said. I have blessed him many times for having given me a treasure by inducing you to accept my hand. But, since then, after securing our mutual happiness, he has taken no more notice of you whatever. How can you explain this change?"

"I cannot explain it," replied Madame Montauron, in a husky voice. "I am sure I never done anything to wound or shock him, and I think that you exaggerate matters a little, my dear. Monsieur de Trémorin has peculiarities of character; he is very eccentric, very whimsical—you have had many proofs of that. We scarcely knew that he had a daughter and a nephew, and his wife has never called upon me, either since or before my marriage. But what shows that he has no serious cause of anger as regards me, is that, on sending his nephew to Paris, he expressly enjoined upon him to present himself not only at your office, but at our house."

"True; I am, however, surprised that he did not write direct to you. Still this is no reason why you should not cordially receive Viscount d'Amaulis, who, besides, deserves that you should interest yourself in him, and appears to me to greatly need your advice and mine. We must try to find a wife for him; don't you think so? If only to repay the baron, we ought to do that. We will give the nephew the same happiness as the uncle has given to us."

"I should be glad to do so, but are you not afraid, my dear, of thwarting Monsieur de Trémorin's plans? His own daughter would be an excellent match for Viscount d'Amaulis," said Madame Montauron.

"Certainly, but she will never have the five millions that Julia Fourcas now possesses, and which the latter would bring as a dowry to Viscount d'Amaulis."

"I doubt whether Julia Fourcas would please the young man, or the marriage suit Monsieur de Trémorin."

"Owing to the source of her fortune?" asked the banker. "Good heavens! I don't pretend to say that the father was irreproachable, but he is dead, and his daughter is not responsible for his acts. She is pretty and well-bred. Her guardian wishes to find a titled husband for her. We may as well undertake to find one. I have quite made up my mind to introduce Monsieur d'Amaulis to her to-morrow. It may lead to what it may, or rather to what he chooses it should lead. You invited her here, did you not?"

"Yes, my dear, and I am rather afraid that she will not be very pleased at finding merely a few business men, and being herself the only young lady present."

"We can have some music as a change, Julia has rather a pretty voice. You can accompany her, unless Monsieur d'Amaulis does so, if by chance he studied music at Plouër, which I doubt. Do you know, Aurélie, why I should be glad to bring about this young man's marriage?"



"You told me a moment ago," was the reply. "Through gratitude towards his uncle."

"And for another reason. I fear that Monsieur d'Amaulis is making very foolish mistakes. Trémorin wished that he should see something of Paris life. I am afraid that he will see too much of it. He was not here a week before he had got into an intrigue."

"An intrigue?" repeated Madame Montauron.

"Yes, indeed. Did you hear what Bouret said to me the other day in the conservatory about a certain casket?"

"A casket?" repeated Madame Montauron, in a faint voice; "no—I do not remember."

She had turned frightfully pale, but twilight had now fallen, and the verandah was not lighted up.

The banker did not see his wife's change of countenance, or if he did, it was not apparent in his manner. "Yes, my love," he resumed, rubbing his hands, "on the very day after his arrival, he came to deposit a very pretty steel casket in the vaults of the Provincial Bank."

"It seems to me now that I do remember that Monsieur Bouret spoke of it before me, but I do not see how that proves that Monsieur d'Amaulis is engaged in carrying on an intrigue."

"It is as clear as day. What do you suppose there is in this casket?"

"Money or valuables, I should say. Were not your vaults built expressly for the purpose of being used as deposit places for such things?"

"Certainly. Then you think that this young man has been saving money down there in Brittany, and that, instead of confiding it to his uncle, he has shut it up in a casket, and brought it with him to Paris?"

"Didn't you say that he was rich?"

"I told you that Monsieur de Trémorin had very skilfully and profitably invested his nephew's fortune, but he knows nothing about it. He thinks that he has six thousand francs a year, and no more. He does not spend this income at Plouër, for the excellent reason that he does not receive it, as the baron manages all things. Monsieur d'Amaulis asks for money when he needs it. He, therefore, does not lay by any savings. He came to Paris with a letter of credit on our house, and the proof that he does not roll in gold is, that on the day after he arrived he made haste to draw the paltry sum of a thousand francs from us. I conclude, from all this, that the casket does not contain money, but something else."

"Family papers, perhaps," timidly suggested Madame Montauron.

"Nonsense! Uncle Trémorin must have the care of all titles and documents as well as of the money. He is cashier and keeper of the archives at one and the same time."

"Then I cannot guess——"

"What is in the casket? You are not very cunning, my dear Aurélie! The first Parisian woman you consult would tell you that the casket is crammed with letters."

"Letters?"

"Yes; letters from some woman, who is, or has been, the viscount's mistress. He values these relics of love, he takes them everywhere about with him, and as hotel rooms are not safe, he thought it best to hire one of our hiding-places to shut up his precious treasure."

"Do you really think, then, that the young man has had a serious attachment already?"

"Why not? He has everything in his favour."

"You forget, my dear, that he sees very little of society."

"True; but he lived for a time at Rennes. She has gone during the seaside season to Saint-Malo and Dinard. Chances for flirting with some fair Parisienne have not been wanting. I will wager, now I think of it, that the lady lives in Paris, and that she has asked him to return her her correspondence. He, perhaps, made the journey on purpose to give her letters back to her."

"What an imagination you have, my dear Charles!" said Madame Montauron, smiling. She had gradually recovered her composure after at first feeling greatly alarmed by her husband's mention of the casket. She now saw that he was on the wrong track, and, as she had never been to the seaside in Brittany, she no longer feared that he suspected her.

"Imagination! I!" exclaimed the banker. "Men of business have only common sense and clear-sightedness. I see that Monsieur d'Amaulis is caught in the net of some coquette, and I should like to marry him to some one so as to get him out of his trouble, if it still be possible. I suspect that he will not be long before claiming his casket, as he now has a place to put it in."

"How is that? You said just now that hotels were not safe."

"Monsieur d'Amaulis is no longer at a hotel."

"Since when?"

"This morning. He decided to accept the offer I made him in your presence."

"What! he is——"

"My tenant for six months. Yes, my love. He lost no time in getting into his new rooms. A friend secured a complete set of furniture for him at the auction-rooms. Bouret sent him his upholsterer—an expeditious man. In three days all was ready. He will sleep to-night in my house in the Rue Rembrandt. I am really delighted to have him for a neighbour. I do not propose watching him, but I hope that he will make fewer blunders, being, so to speak, under the very eyes of his uncle's friends."

Madame Montauron said nothing. The news which her husband imparted troubled her, and she reflected upon the possible consequences of Savinien d'Amaulis' change of abode.

"Trémorin will thank me for what I have done," resumed the banker. "His nephew, I fear, is only too ready to plunge into a life of mere amusement, and he has fallen into bad hands. That Fougeray, his old schoolfellow, made him win a hundred thousand francs at the Bourse, and introduced him into a third-rate club, where reckless play goes on. Bouret told me that on the very first night Monsieur D'Amaulis lost a large amount to a foreigner, who is a man of very suspicious character."

"Ah!" murmured Madame Montauron, somewhat absently.

"Yes, good heavens! these clubs are full of men who come, no one knows whence, and cheat unsuspecting players. The man who robbed Monsieur d'Amaulis of a portion of his profits on 'Change was a Swede, and calls himself, it appears, Count Aparanda. But what ails you, my love? Are you ill?"

"No, no, it is nothing, it is only a chill caused by this cool evening air," murmured Madame Montauron, who had not been able to prevent herself from starting nervously.

"And I am keeping you out here under this porch exposed to winds from all sides!" exclaimed the banker, rising hurriedly. "I am unpar-

donable for having forgotten that the night air doesn't suit you. I will ring for lights and see you to your own room."

"No, my love; I am quite comfortable here, and I so seldom have the pleasure of passing an evening with you."

"I wish that I could give it all to you, my dear Aurélie. Unfortunately I must attend a shareholders' meeting to-night, and must leave you. But you must promise me to go into the house. These trees make the porch very damp. It is charming to be in the garden, but in the spring, when the sun has set, it isn't healthy."

"You are right, Charles. I will return to my room. Brigitte will read to me."

"Look there, my love!" exclaimed M. Montauron, "see the effect of our young friend moving into his new rooms. It is only nine o'clock, and he has already returned. Is not this a beginning of good behaviour?"

"Monsieur d'Amaulis? How do you know?"

"I see a light in his room. Look! over there, at the end of the low railing that encloses this side; the two windows which are lighted up on the ground-floor are those I mean, the ones on the right hand."

"Ah! that is the place?"

"Yes. The rooms I have let to him face us. You know that the garden belonging to our house joins the smaller one which I laid out three years ago in the Rue Rembrandt? Monsieur d'Amaulis will have to be on his good behaviour," added M. Montauron. "From our first-floor windows we can see everything that goes on in his rooms."

A man in livery, who had been rung for, now appeared with a lamp, and this servant's arrival gave Madame Montauron an excuse for remaining silent.

Her husband no longer thought of his new neighbour. He had taken out his watch, and this indicated that he was about to go to the shareholders' meeting he had spoken of; it was indeed already late.

"I have just time to get there," said he, sighing. "I hate business when it obliges me to go out at a time when I wish to stay at home. Heaven knows whether I shall even be able to break away from business so as to breakfast with you! I haven't belonged to myself for some days past. I forget hours, I forget——"

"You will not forget our reception to-morrow evening?" interrupted Madame Montauron, trying to smile.

"No, my dear Aurélie," answered the banker, in a gay tone; "I have not yet lost my head. Ah! speaking of the reception, do me the favour to wear all your diamonds. I wish you to dazzle the eyes of Baron de Trémorin's nephew. It is agreed, is it not? All your diamonds!"

With this M. Montauron went off, after kissing his wife's hand. She had scarcely strength to rise from the arm-chair in which she was seated

"My diamonds!" she murmured. "Ah! I am lost!"

## VI.

SAVINIEN had made a really good bargain at the Hôtel des Ventes, and M. Bouret's upholsterer had surpassed himself. The furniture, bought by auction, seemed as though it had been expressly made for furnishing the ground floor in the Rue Rembrandt, and the upholsterer had only required two days to arrange it. Everything was ready, Viscount

d'Amaulis had only to order his luggage to be sent there. The hotel-keeper at the Rue du Helder undertook to receive such letters as might come, and to forward them daily, as Savinien did not think fit to inform the inmates of the manor of Plouër of his change of residence. He had taken these rooms and furnished them almost in a fit of spite, and looked upon his stay in them as but transient. To make all things fitting a valet was necessary; but, although George Fougeray had offered to find one, Savinien had begged him not to be over-hasty in the matter, and had contented himself, for the time being, with the services of his door-keeper. Savinien did not wish to make any permanent arrangements, for the excellent reason that he was more than ever determined to leave Paris as soon as his hundred thousand francs were spent, and Madame Montauron's difficulties arranged.

He had determined to return to Plouër with clean hands and a clear head, even supposing that after his return it should be necessary to tell his uncle all the adventures of his shortened stay. As regards his money, it looked likely that there would soon be an end to that. George had made no trouble about receiving his share, and Savinien had diminished his own portion by thirty thousand francs, of which fifteen thousand had been swept away at baccarat, as payment for his welcome at the Plungers' Club. He hoped that the rest would not go far, although he declined any objectionable help in squandering it. Avoiding Anita, he looked up Adhémar de Laffemas, who made several racing bets for his young relative while waiting till he could obtain his admission to the "Jockey." As for the "Plungers," Savinien had not returned there, although he might have met Count Aparanda there, as the latter regularly put in an appearance every evening. The two gentlemen had been introduced to each other at dinner on the evening after the auction sale, and this meal had been followed by heavy play, at which the Swede won almost all that Savinien lost. But the latter was no more advanced concerning the noble foreigner, who greatly puzzled him, being extremely reserved, and apparently little disposed to become intimate with the members of a club at which he only appeared for the sake of winning money at cards.

There was nothing to be learned by going there, and the viscount could not ascertain anything elsewhere about him without compromising the imprudent woman whom he wished to serve. He had determined to do nothing until Madame Montauron could tell him clearly what she expected of him. He remembered the conversation in the conservatory, and he relied upon her to bring about an opportunity for a fresh interview, a longer and less closely watched one. He did not hope that such an occasion would present itself at the Friday reception, but he thought that Madame Montauron would profit by this evening gathering, to tell him how to meet her elsewhere. The more numerous the guests in a room the less difficult it is, even for the hostess, to exchange a few private words with one of the persons she had invited.

The Friday which was again to place Savinien d'Amaulis in the presence of the banker and his wife drew nearer and nearer. Since his first and only visit to the mansion in the Avenue Ruysdaël he had not seen either of them, although he had become their tenant. The obliging and indefatigable Bouret had undertaken to arrange with his partner for the moving-in, as well as to hasten the moving-out of the previous tenant. And so, on Thursday evening, Baron de Trémorin's nephew took possession of his rooms, after dining alone at a restaurant, where he was sure of only

meeting country people. He wished to avoid George, who was always proposing a house-warming with objectionable company, and he wanted to retire early, after writing a letter to his uncle in terms which it was difficult to find, as it was necessary to disguise the truth, and yet not tell a falsehood.

Before setting about this difficult task, Savinien amused himself with making an inventory of his unexpected possessions in the way of furniture, and looking around his so suddenly selected rooms. All was as it should be. The furniture was new and in good taste, the place convenient. The viscount had never been so handsomely lodged in his life. It was true that family portraits were lacking, as well as distant views to contemplate from the windows. The entrance was through a courtyard which faced the Rue Rembrandt, and there was an exit by way of a garden full of flowers, of which the ground-floor tenant had the exclusive enjoyment, and which was only separated by a railing from an immense park filled with trees a hundred years old.

Savinien, who was not familiar with the topography of this part of Paris, was some little time in recollecting what park this was. But suddenly he remembered that it was the very one through which he had strolled one morning with M. Montauron, and that the superb house seen in the distance was the abode of the rich financier. This proximity caused him to reflect. He seated himself on a garden bench near one of his windows, and smoked several cigars while he thought of the danger to which Madame Montauron was exposed, and the possibilities of meeting her.

"It seems to me," he thought, "that it depends upon her alone to come to my rooms without being seen. She has certainly some way of going in and out without being observed, as neither her husband nor her servants knew anything of her absence on the morning when she went to the Rue du Helder hotel. It would be much easier to slip out at night, and if she has a key of the gate between the two gardens, she will have no difficulty in arranging a private interview with me."

He then asked himself whether he ought to desire a visit at night time from the woman he wished to save, but whom he did not care to follow along a dangerous path. And, little by little, he examined his own conscience, and analysed his feelings as regarded Madame Montauron, asking his heart whether it entered into the interest he took in her.

She was still beautiful, this compromised, or rather this guilty woman—for she had certainly guilt to reproach herself with—and at Savinien's age, a young man is greatly in danger of falling in love with an erring woman if he undertakes to protect her. He thought himself in no danger of becoming too deeply interested, but he did not care to be exposed to peril too often, and arrived at the conclusion that he would do wisely by freeing himself as soon as possible of all communion of interest with this lady.

What remained to be effected after all? The removal of a casket deposited at the Provincial Bank, and its restoration to its owner. The first of these operations was very simple; it remained for Madame Montauron to facilitate the second. Savinien did not need to know the contents of the casket, nor was he any more anxious for precise information concerning Count Aparanda. What did it matter to him, after all, whether the Swede was or was not Madame Montauron's lover! At the utmost he was only bound to tell her that this peculiar individual apparently intended to remain in Paris, and that she could obtain his address at the Plunøvers' Club.

When Savinien re-entered his rooms, after a long stay in the open air, he had made up his mind not to worry himself over-much, but to bring all these complicated and perilous affairs to a speedy conclusion. The moment was well chosen for writing to his uncle, and at the same time to his cousin Yvonne. He found his lamp lighted and his writing materials ready, the door-keeper having been desirous of proving from the outset that he could wait as well as any valet.

Savinien sat down near the table, and after the usual heading: "My dear uncle," he stopped short. His ideas refused to come. He was far from having a fine style, but wrote with some facility as a general rule, and when addressing his uncle he was not apt to be at a loss. M. de Trémorin, a man of excellent good sense, did not exact fine phrases, or a ceremonious way of writing. He only asked his nephew to be clear and sincere, and carried his love of frankness so far that, on the day of their parting, he had advised him to hide nothing, not even his flirtations from him, promising him not to mention these little amusements to his daughter Yvonne.

Still, on this evening, for the first time, Savinien's pen, instead of flying over the paper, remained motionless between his fingers. This was not because he had nothing to say. On the contrary, he could have written ten pages had he not hesitated to explain how he was situated. The difficulty lay with his winnings at the Bourse, and his losses at the Plungers' Club. The owner of Plouër had not always lived on his estate; Savinien knew that he had been rather wild in his youth, and was aware that this fact induced him to be very indulgent as to the failings of others. This exceptional uncle had in his last letter advised the viscount not to lead in Paris the life of a "college scout"—such was the term which he made use of to deter him from excess of wisdom.

He could not object to the viscount promptly ridding himself of the profits of one of those strokes of luck which a gentleman does not seek, but which he may avail himself of when they come. It was probable, also, that the baron would not blame him for the purchase of the furniture and the moving to the elegant ground-floor in the Rue Rembrandt, where all the houses seemed built to harbour the wealthy. Savinien was supposed to remain in Paris for six months. He was not forbidden to live suitably, instead of remaining at a hotel. He might, therefore, speak of these matters to his uncle without any danger of exciting his anger. But it was impossible for him to mention his strange adventure with Madame Montauron, and as this was linked with all the other incidents of his sojourn in Paris, there was not one of these he could speak of without reservation to M. de Trémorin. It was, nevertheless, necessary to write a long letter to him, and he had been promising so to do for some days past, but had only found time to scribble off a laconic note in which affectionate expressions and good wishes took the place of absent details.

The time had now come for Savinien to keep his word, and, besides, he greatly wished to obtain from his uncle some facts as to Madame Montauron's past, and her former relations with M. de Trémorin, who, so she said, had brought about her marriage. The question was not easily broached, and it was a delicate one to treat; but, taking a roundabout way, it was not impossible to lay it before M. de Trémorin without arousing any feelings of suspicion on his part.

Savinien had tact and skill enough to try this somewhat risky experiment. The hour, besides, was well suited for writing a letter of which he

wished to weigh every word. He had closed the window overlooking the garden. The doorkeeper who served him as valet was too well trained to allow any one to disturb him. The most profound silence prevailed around. The house was inhabited only by quiet people, and at ten o'clock at night vehicles do not pass along the Rue Rembrandt, unless some reception is being held at a private residence in the neighbourhood.

Besides, the rooms being between court and garden, sounds did not reach them from without. These rooms consisted of four divisions, as M. Bouret had stated; four separate apartments, without counting the ante-room, which was entered by a door communicating with a wide hall running from the courtyard to the garden; a dining-room was contiguous to a smoking-room, and, further off, a dressing-room communicated with a bedroom.

The dining-room was reached before the dressing-room, and had two windows overlooking the courtyard, the smoking-room was entered before the bedroom, and had also two windows. These faced the garden, those of the smoking-room being level with it, and it was in this last apartment that Savinien sat himself down to write to his uncle. All of these rooms, be it noted, communicated with one another. But they might—all of them—be examined without passing twice by the same doorway, excepting the entrance one adjoining the hall. From the ante-room a person might proceed straight into the dining-room or smoking-room as he pleased.

The provincial architect who had formerly built Plouër Manor had not taken such pains as these with that feudal erection; and Savinien concluded that one is much better located in Parisian houses which do not last four centuries, but which are made, as they should be, for the convenience of their occupants. He was surprised to find how delightful his little nest was, and congratulated himself upon having left the Rue du Helder, where disagreeable intrusions might again occur. "Here, at least," thought he, "jealous husbands will not rush in upon me."

After mature reflection he ended by writing as follows:—"My dear uncle,—If I do not write as often as I should like to do, you must lay the blame of it upon those who have so warmly received me, our relations and friends who do this on your account. I do not know which of them to satisfy first, and my time is taken up in making and receiving visits."

"This is not the exact state of the case," muttered the nephew to himself, "but it is only partly untrue, for had he not introduced me to Monsieur Montauron by letter, I should have had plenty of leisure. Since my arrival I have been taken up entirely with the husband and the wife."

Returning to his difficult task, he wrote: The Viscountess de Loudinières, who is a Trémorin, would like to have me dine with her three times a week, if only to introduce me to all her relatives in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but I fight against this because she declares that she will marry me to some heiress. It seems that she has always a ready supply. I don't doubt their attractions, but I have taken it into my head to be married at the old church at Plouër, and these young ladies would think that too far off.

He paused again, and resumed his soliloquy. "This time, I say what I mean, and I hope that my uncle will read that part aloud to Yvonne. One more side-dish, as it were, before coming to the best part. Now for my dexterous transition to the Montaurons."

"My cousin Adhémar de Laffemas," he wrote, "has no thought of getting me to marry, or of being married himself, but he has shown me a

great deal of attention. He is acquainted with the best society, and I could easily obtain a footing in it, for, if I did as he wishes, we should never be apart. But I defend myself against him also. I value my estate, and I should soon be reduced to selling it if I listened to him."

"If my uncle," thought Savinien, "knew that I had made, on the day after my arrival, enough money to buy a very pretty farm, he would admire my prudence. But that is not the matter in hand. I will now attack the main question. What shall I say of Monsieur Montauron's manner of receiving me? Ah! I have it!"

"Your banker," he wrote, "could not have treated me with more courtesy, had I been the largest shareholder in the Provincial Bank, which is kept like a minister's offices. When one enters this princely establishment, it seems as though a word might make one leave it a millionaire. I am almost tempted to think that if I applied to Monsieur Montauron, he would make my fortune for me instead of helping to ruin me, as might cousin Adhémar. The powerful capitalist overwhelmed me with offers of service, and introduced me to his wife, who is charming. She received me very graciously, and I can, to a certain extent, understand this, as she told me, to my great surprise, that you had made her marriage. I confess that I had no idea of that, as before this trip you never mentioned her to me. That reminds me, my dear uncle, that I should very much like to know—you will say that I have a great deal of curiosity, but never mind—I should very much like to know what was her maiden name, and I naturally hesitated to ask her the question."

Savinien had just reached this point when a slight noise caused him to turn his head. It seemed to him as though he had heard the sharp sound of a closing gate. He looked out of the window, saw nothing and resumed his occupation, but the ensuing phrase was long in coming.

"Is she related to you?" he added, after reflecting. "You told me that she was of very good family, and it is sufficient to see her to be sure that she does not belong to the same society as her husband. How did this marriage come about? I confess that I have wondered at it, and that——"

At this moment three taps were heard upon the panes of the glass door which communicated with the garden—hasty taps, like those of a person in trouble. This time, Savinien did not content himself with merely turning his head. He rose quickly and hastened to the window, leaving his letter unfinished and throwing his pen upon the table.

At the first glance he had discerned behind the glass a woman's profile, and he immediately thought that a woman coming in this direction could only have come from the banker's house. What was her errand? A message; perhaps a reply to the question which he had asked his uncle. The proverb: "Speak of a wolf and you hear it howl" is applicable to letters as well as to conversation.

These thoughts crossed Savinien's mind in less than a second, and he was not greatly surprised, when, on opening the door, he recognised the person who had knocked.

He remembered that Madame Montauron had told him of a means of communication that existed between her park and the little garden of the house in the Rue Rembrandt.

"You, madame?" he exclaimed, standing aside to let her pass.

"You are alone, are you not?" said she, in a low voice.

"Yes, certainly, and I am not expecting any one, but are you not afraid that your husband——"



"My husband," interrupted Madame Montauron, "is not at home. He has just left me and I shall not see him to-night."

"But your servants may see you."

"I can go and come without meeting them. There is a staircase which leads straight to my room from the park, and of which I alone have the key, as well as that of the gate which separates our garden from yours. The door-keeper here has his lodging on the other side of the house near the courtyard, and to return home I can take the way I came by."

While Madame Montauron was speaking, Viscount d'Amaulis, somewhat reassured, carefully closed the glass door, and drew the curtain. This was a wise precaution, indeed, for the light of his lamp could be seen from a distance, and any one who had stealthily approached might have easily seen and recognised the banker's wife through the panes of glass. She had seated herself without being asked, and did not wait to be questioned.

"Forgive me," she began, "forgive me for having again recourse to you ; this shall be the last time. The danger I am in is as great, greater, perhaps, than that in which I found myself on the day when you saved me, but at least you will not be obliged to expose yourself to peril in order to rid me of it, or to compromise yourself either."

Savinien bowed without replying. This opening left him indifferent. He thought it quite enough to have already compromised himself, and that it was time for his part as a saviour to come to an end. However, he could scarcely refuse to complete his work of charity, but, before making any promise, he wished to know the nature of the service which the lady was about to ask of him. He wished also to find out whether she had the intention of being frank, and was telling him the exact truth. There had been enough mystery and equivocal behaviour. If Madame Montauron had confidence in him she would certainly confide to him her position respecting the foreigner of the hotel in the Rue du Helder, and the nature of the contents of the famous casket which played so important a part in this complicated intrigue.

"You cannot have forgotten," she said, with a display of emotion, "the conversation which we had together in the conservatory at my house, and which my husband interrupted."

"No, madame," replied Savinien, "and since then, I have been hoping that you would let me know what you expect of me. I could not act without seeing you again ; and receiving no communication from you, I thought that to-morrow evening, at your house, where I intend calling, you would instruct me as to the casket."

"To-morrow evening it will be too late. It is on account of that I have come."

"Too late?" repeated the viscount in an interrogative tone.

"Yes, I must have my casket to-morrow in the course of the day. If I do not have it, my husband will entertain no further doubt but what I placed it in your hands."

"Why should he know that any better to-morrow than to-day or yesterday? How has the situation changed? Has Monsieur Montauron any suspicions?"

"I thought not, an hour ago. Now, I am sure that Monsieur Bouret's absurd talk has aroused his mistrust. You were there when that detestable man minutely described the steel box which you deposited at the Provincial Bank."

"I remember that, and it seemed to me that he might well have abstained from such indiscretion. His business ought to be to keep his customers' secrets."

"He even went so far as to mention the number of the compartment hired by you. Did he do so maliciously? I shouldn't be surprised at it, as he wishes me no good. However, be that as it may, Monsieur Montauron did not lose a word of what he said."

"Then did Monsieur Montauron recognise the casket by the description which his partner gave in his presence?"

"Perhaps. Monsieur Montauron must have seen this casket which belonged to me before I was married, and he cannot have forgotten that the woman whom he followed to the hotel in the Rue du Helder had an object of similar dimensions in her hand."

"That is very likely," muttered Savinien d'Amaulis, with a gesture of assent. "It seems to me, however, that if this idea had come into his head he would not have stopped at that; for he had only to ask you on some pretext or other to show him this casket."

"He has not asked that. He has even refrained from coming into my rooms since your visit. I flattered myself that he had paid no attention to Monsieur Bouret's tattle, and I thought that to-morrow at the reception which you have promised to attend, I should be able to tell you how to return me this unlucky casket without any danger either to yourself or me. But now I cannot deceive myself as to the frame of mind in which my husband finds himself since Monsieur Bouret's indiscreet remarks."

"What has happened?"

"Just now, before going out, Monsieur Montauron, who had dined alone with me, proposed a walk in the garden. I preferred sitting under the verandah facing this house. The windows of your rooms are visible from there. He sent away the servants so we were alone. He took advantage of this opportunity to speak of a subject which he usually never refers to. He talked of our marriage, our first meeting twelve years ago. He spoke in a tone of affection, almost a sentimental one, which surprised me, as this is not habitual with him. Then he spoke of your uncle and of you. This was natural enough, but he insisted in a peculiar manner upon my introducing to you a young girl who would suit you as a wife, at least so he says."

"I told him only the other day," said Savinien, "that I had not come to Paris to be married. I am surprised that he should hold on to this object."

"It seemed to me that he spoke of it so as to find out my opinion, and also to lead up to the remark that this marriage would be an excellent way to withdraw you from an intrigue in which you were engaged."

"An intrigue?" ejaculated Viscount d'Amaulis in surprise.

"Yes, an intrigue with a woman. It was then that he opened a more direct attack. It was then that he said that the casket must contain some letters from this woman, who was without doubt married. Did he say this to try me? Did he say this to entrap me? Did he think that I should have some emotion? I thought that for a moment, but I had no difficulty in remaining calm, for his suspicions all tended to error, and I answered so as to remove them. Then he announced to me that you would doubtless soon remove the casket—you see he returns to that subject constantly—that you were no longer at a hotel, and that, having taken apartments where the correspondence of this woman would be as safe as in the

vaults of the Provincial Bank, you would not fail to secure possession of it again at an early day."

"It is strange that he should trouble himself so much about me," said Savinien, "but that by no means proves, madame, that he has guessed the truth. He knows very well that I was not acquainted with you before coming to Paris; he cannot, therefore, think that these letters are yours."

"He believes that the casket belongs to me, and this is what he has devised in order to find out whether he is mistaken or not. You know that every Friday we receive people, men only. I do not dress on such evenings as if I were going to a ball. But on leaving me my husband said to me in a tone which admitted of no reply: 'I wish that you would put on all your diamonds to-morrow evening; remember, all of them.' He said this because he knows that I keep them in a jewel-box similar to that described to him by Monsieur Bouret."

"Your diamonds!" exclaimed Viscount d'Amaulis; "were you taking your diamonds to the foreigner who resided over my room at the hotel?"

"To him! no!" said Madame Montauron, eagerly.

"To whom, then?" said Savinien. "You asked me to give the casket to him."

"And it contains my diamonds; that is true."

"You admit it! Ah, madame, had I known this, I beg of you to believe that I would have got rid of it at any cost! I would rather have thrown it into the street than have taken charge of it."

"Why?"

"Why?" asked Savinien. "You don't understand, then, that if your husband finds out the truth I shall be disgraced?"

"Disgraced! You?"

"Undoubtedly. A man who receives money from a woman is a scoundrel, and your diamonds are probably worth a great deal of money."

"Two hundred thousand francs."

"You never thought, then, of the frightful situation in which you would place me if this casket should fall into Monsieur Montauron's hands?" asked Savinien.

"You are mistaken, sir. Whatever might happen, my husband would never accuse Viscount d'Amaulis of a disgraceful act."

"He would at least accuse me of being an accomplice in an act which I do not wish to qualify. They do not belong to you, those diamonds, since you are a married woman, any more than your house or your fortune. All of them belong to your husband as much as to you. And the outsider who accepted such a fortune——"

"Stay! who told you that it was intended for the foreigner?"

"Explain your course of conduct, then, if you wish me to excuse it."

"I might reply that you have no right to judge it," said Madame Montauron, with an air which prompted reflection on the part of M. de Trémorin's nephew, "and that you have no right to condemn me before hearing what I have to say; also, that a gentleman never tries to find out a woman's secrets. I prefer, however, to entreat you for your help to save me once more."

"What do you expect of me?"

"Nothing but what is very easy. I came to tell you that my husband requires that I shall put on all my diamonds to-morrow. If he exacts this, it is because he suspects me of having disposed of them, for he never busies himself about my attire, and I have not worn them a dozen times

since we were married. I must, however, tell you that these diamonds are my own personal property. I found them in my *trousseau* as a bridal present, and Monsieur Montauron has often told me to do as I pleased with them."

"He did not foresee the use to which you would apply them," said Savinien, coldly.

"No, sir; but I have always known that a day would come when I should be forced to part with them, and if you knew for what purpose I intended to turn them into money, you would not blame me. I meant to sell them unknown to my husband, I confess it, and in order that they should not appear to have been sold, I intended replacing them by false stones. Now-a-days, false stones are made to imitate real ones to perfection, and I had only to confide my jewels for a few days to a skilful workman, to have similar ones made. Time was wanting to carry out this plan. I was upset by an unexpected event. I did not, I could not, hesitate. You know what I did, and by what fatality the casket which I was compelled to leave with you is now in the vaults of the Provincial Bank. All is not lost, however, since you can withdraw it, and I have come to ask you to restore it to me."

"I am ready to do what is necessary. I will go to-morrow to the bank and take back the casket which I deposited there. I think that there will be no difficulty about the matter, and if you will tell me how to transmit the casket to you, I——"

"A woman who has been with me from my childhood, and who has always taken care of me, will be with you to-morrow at three o'clock. Her name is Brigitte, and in order that you may be sure of her identity, she will bring a letter from me. You may give the casket to her."

"Very well!" exclaimed Savinien, happy to be rid of his perplexity on such easy terms. "Rely upon me, madame."

"I thank you, sir," said Madame Montauron, suppressing her emotion. "I expected no less from you, and I hope that I shall soon be able to prove to you that your uncle would approve of your helping me in the frightful position in which I find myself. The hour has not come for speaking to you of my past. When you know it you will perhaps absolve me. But at this moment let me warn you of a danger which you have not perhaps thought of in proposing to go to take out the casket. Don't you fear that on presenting yourself at the Provincial Bank, Monsieur Bouret may come forward?"

"No, madame. It was altogether unusual for him to go with me himself, as he did, when I became a depositor. But, as a general rule, a clerk waits upon the subscribers and goes with them to the entrance of the vaults into which they descend alone. They only meet a watchman there who does not busy himself as to what they do."

"Ah! you reassure me, sir! I feared some fresh indiscretion on the part of this man whose idle talk aroused my husband's suspicions. To-morrow, then, at three o'clock."

"I shall wait for your messenger, and she shall not return to you empty-handed, for I will go to the Provincial Bank in the morning."

"Yes, in the morning; my husband never goes there then," said Madame Montauron, in a low tone, evidently answering an alarming question which had arisen in her own mind.

Savinien was silent. He hoped that the interview was about to end, and he was not sorry, for, do what he could, he felt ill at ease. The

presence of Madame Montauron troubled him to such a degree that he was afraid to look at her, or to allow himself to admire her too much. He also remembered that their first private interview had been broken in upon in a disagreeable manner. The situation had certainly changed since the scene in the Rue du Helder, but if M. Montauron had again begun to suspect his wife, he must also suspect Viscount d'Amaulis, and there was nothing to prove that he would not be tempted to watch them both.

The road which the lady had taken to reach Savinien's rooms might also be taken by him to follow her, and it would then be the beginning of a worse scene than at the hotel, for in the Rue Rembrandt the house was his own property. There was no help to be looked for in such a case from an obliging hotel-keeper, no possible flight by a secret door, since the fugitive would be obliged to pass out, under such circumstances, in sight of a door-keeper in her husband's employ. All this was far from reassuring.

"Ah! sir," said Madame Montauron, after a somewhat long pause, "I assure you that you shall one day know—soon, perhaps—why I wish again to see the person who lodged in the hotel with you."

"You don't imagine that I shall help you to do so?" asked Savinien, astonished and shocked by this return to facts which, for the sake of Madame Montauron's honour, he would have been glad to forget.

"You told me that this person was still in Paris—that you had met him," she said, "and my husband told me this evening that a foreigner, who is a member of a club into which you have been admitted, had won money from you at cards. Monsieur Montauron was told of this by Monsieur Bouret. He does not know this foreigner, but he knows his name."

"He alludes, no doubt, to Count Aparanda," interrupted Savinien, impatiently. "He's a member, in fact, of the same club as I belong to, and I have lost a large amount at cards to him. But I have no wish to know him apart from that."

"You may at least know where he now resides?"

Viscount d'Amaulis gave a significant shrug, and was silent. It was as much as to say: "What do you take me for, to ask me like that for your lover's address?"

Madame Montauron understood him. "Pardon me, sir," said she, with emotion. "I have wounded your pride, and I feel that I must have done so. But I suffer such anguish that you will be more indulgent, I am sure, when you know why I wish to see Count Aparanda again. I will tell you why—I will tell you the painful story of my life; and if, after having heard it, you still doubt my sincerity, Monsieur de Trémorin, your uncle, will assure you that I have not deceived you. I was the daughter of his most intimate friend, and but twenty years of age when he resolved to save me from the abyss into which I had fallen."

Madame Montauron paused, perceiving that Savinien was not paying attention to her. Indeed he was listening to sounds which seemed to come from the hall. Some one was walking, or rather stamping about, and speaking loudly at the front door of the rooms. "Do you hear?" asked Savinien.

Madame Montauron did not reply. She was listening, and her pallor was perceptible.

"If it were your husband," said the viscount, "but it seems to me that I hear several voices—your husband would be alone—unless——"

"He would not have come this way," faltered the lady.

Yvonne's cousin tried to calm his own mind, but failed to do so. A terrible thought disturbed him. M. Montauron might have watched his wife, who believed him to have gone away, have seen her open the gate, and, perhaps, have brought a police officer with him to bear witness as to her guilt. The poor viscount already foresaw all the results of such a scandalous occurrence.

"There are at least three persons," thought he, "the husband, the officer, and the doorkeeper, whom they have called upon to help them. I am only surprised that they should make so much noise. When people are about to surprise others they don't talk so loud."

"It seems to me that there is a woman," said Madame Montauron.

"A woman? Impossible!—still—that piercing voice, which rises above all the rest, would seem——"

"She is laughing loudly," interrupted Madame Montauron.

"That is true, and it reassures me—it isn't you whom they are looking for. It is undoubtedly some people who have been dining gaily."

"They would not stop before your door, however; and, besides, the house has none but quiet married couples living in it."

"That is no reason why—but stay!—they are quiet now. Their steps grow more distant," said Savinien, in a lower tone, as, in order to hear more distinctly, he partly opened the door of the ante-room.

"They would seem to be directing themselves towards the garden, the hall ends there."

A loud ring at the bell curtailed the dialogue. This time there was no room for doubt. It was indeed Viscount d'Amaulis whom these intruders wished to see at this late hour.

"Fear nothing," said he. "I shall not open the door."

There came a louder ring, and then a very deep male voice articulated the following appeal: "Savinien, open the door, my dear friend. I know that you are at home."

Savinien made an angry gesture, but his brow cleared. He had recognised the voice, and knew whom he had to deal with.

"Don't be alarmed, madame," said he, in a whisper. "Monsieur Montauron has nothing to do with this intrusion."

"Who is it?" asked the lady, somewhat less terrified.

"An old college chum of mine, George Fougerey."

"Good heavens! He knows my husband, and he knows me! What has he come here for? Who knows but that he is aware that I am here?"

"How could that be? I didn't know myself that you were coming."

"What does he want?"

"I presume that he is intoxicated, and wants a companion to join him in finishing his night in the same way that he has begun it, but he won't get me to join him."

"I warn you that we shall not stir from here till you open the door," resumed the voice. "We shall sleep, if necessary, on the hall floor."

"Door! if you please!" cried another rioter, imitating the vexed voice of some coachman driving his master home late at night, and calling out to the doorkeeper from his seat on the box.

"Savinien! Savinien!" yelled the woman at this moment.

"These wretches will end by rousing the whole house," murmured the viscount. He was in consternation, and at a loss what to do.

"You will not succeed in getting rid of them," said Madame Mon-

tauron, less anxious than he, as she no longer feared a repetition of the scene at the Rue du Helder hotel. "It would be better for you to receive them when I have gone. I can return home through the park without being seen by them."

"Yes; that is, I think, the only way to escape them. It is only necessary to open the glass door which overlooks the garden. I will close it again before they come in, and they will see nothing."

"Answer them now, and hold a parley with them through the door to detain them while I run off."

The bell was rung again with incredible violence, and the outrageous disturbance did not cease for a moment.

"Who are you? What do you want?" cried Savinien, loud enough for the ringers to hear him.

"Good night, sir, to-morrow at three o'clock Brigitte will come to you," said Madame Montauron in a whisper, going to the glass door.

"You may rely upon my placing the casket in her hands; but get away, madame, as fast as you can."

"Don't play the innocent," answered George Fougeray from outside. "You know my voice very well, and I have friends of both sexes with me, who have come to see you, and whom you will be charmed to see. Open the door; you won't regret it. We have come to take you to play a game that will amuse you."

"Go to the deuce with your game! I am half dead with sleep, and I wish to be quiet. It is bad enough to have disturbed me just as I was going to bed."

"That is no reason why you should leave us at the door. Open, I say! You can sleep if you like, and we will rock the cradle."

"Thank you; I don't require rocking. Go to bed yourselves! It is the best thing you can do, as you are all as drunk as fools."

While thus replying, in order to gain time, Savinien watched Madame Montauron as she crossed the smoking-room, she had now only to draw back the curtains and open the glass-door. Suddenly, however, he saw her recoil, and return to him with a terrified face. "Some one tapped upon the glass," said she, in a faint tone, "I am lost! there is some one in the garden."

For an instant the viscount thought that a fresh peril had arisen, and that M. Montauron was about to appear to cut off his wife's retreat. But George began to howl out: "You are surrounded, my lad! I have placed a sentry under your windows. So now don't attempt to escape that way!"

"It is one of those good-for-nothing fellows who tapped," said Savinien. "I was afraid of something worse."

"So was I," faltered Madame Montauron, "but you cannot rid yourself of them. What shall we do, in the name of Heaven?"

"Go into my room and shut yourself in while I receive them," answered the viscount in despair. "It is the only way to end it."

"You answer for it that they shall not see me?"

"They shall not go beyond the smoking-room, and won't remain long. I undertake to turn them out, and I will have a plain talk with Monsieur Fougeray for bringing them here."

"Come, Savinien, surrender, my lad," resumed George in a laughing tone; "we shall not raise the siege, and I defy you to run the blockade. The hemming-in is a complete success. Capitulate, my friend! Our terms will not be hard."

"I rely on you," said Madame Montauron, "and I entreat you to shorten my sufferings."

"I promise you, madame, that I will soon set you free," replied the viscount, who stood ready to cross the ante-room and accost the enemy as soon as the imprudent woman whom he was again obliged to protect should be safely concealed. He saw her enter the sleeping-room, and heard her lock the door. As soon as the slight noise made by the gliding catch announced that this was done, he began once more to abuse the intruders before opening the door to them. He wished to appear to have yielded after mature reflection.

"You are really determined to come in?" said he, walking towards the door; "you wish to come into my rooms?"

"I should think we did, indeed," replied the woman.

"I warn you that you will have a cold reception, and that I will not allow you to settle down here to continue acting in this way."

"Don't be alarmed; we don't intend to stay all night," replied George.

"I trust not," answered the viscount. And thinking that he had said all that was necessary, he opened the door. The gas was not extinguished till midnight in the well-kept house in which he resided, so there was still a light in the hall. The first face that Savinien d'Amaulis caught sight of was that of the fair Anita, who was not performing that night, the new play at the "Variétés," having proved a dead failure, and having been withdrawn.

"Viscount of my heart," she abruptly said, "you have made me play a nice part, but I forgive you, as I immediately guessed that there was a woman here. Oh don't deny it! It is the only thing that could excuse your delay in opening your door for us."

"You are crazy," answered Savinien, angrily.

"We came to take you away," began George Fougeray, pushing Anita into the room.

Two gentlemen followed. They had supped with the Viscount d'Amaulis on the night of his arrival in Paris, and were well-bred men, to a certain extent, one of them being more or less an *attaché* to an embassy. The other was a Russian who was eagerly greeted as a prince at restaurants of a fashionable kind, and the gentleman from Brittany liked him fairly well. The appearance of this rear-guard changed Savinien's ideas. He would not have hesitated to express his annoyance most fully to George and the girl who had entered before him, but he saw that it would be an awkward thing to treat in too serious a manner a farce in which two men of the world had made the mistake of taking part. In the beautiful language of the age of chivalry they might have answered: "Among knights there are such free manners as these." And, after all, there was nothing to be said, especially against them. They had evidently been induced to take part in this ridiculous expedition by George Fougeray or by Anita. Besides, Savinien was no longer anxious. However ready George might be to start anything of the kind, he was not a man to assemble a lot of people together to surprise a woman of society at the house of one of his intimate friends. The gay party were certainly far from thinking of Madame Montauron. It was necessary, now, to find out what these inconvenient revellers—not badly intentioned—really wanted, and to get rid of them as soon as might be. The *attaché*, whose name was Louis de Boisguérin, excused himself very cleverly for having yielded to his friend Fougeray's urging; and the Russian, who was called Constantine



Glébof, uttered no end of confused phrases about "little game" and "big game."

Savinien kept a smile upon his face, and assured them that he was glad to see them. But he was about to ask an explanation of Fougeray, when the giddy Anita took up the reply. "You have hidden her, haven't you, my boy?" said she, looking about in every corner, as though she expected to find a woman hidden in a closet or under an arm-chair.

"Ah! that is too much!" cried the viscount, in anger, and he added harshly, "I beg you to drop the subject and behave yourself."

"Why? because I speak familiarly to you? Very well, viscount, I, will obey; but that does not alter the case. We interrupted a private talk, I am sure of it!"

"Well, what of it?" said George, judging fit to put himself forward. "Isn't our friend free to receive evening visits? Instead of talking to him of what doesn't concern you, you had better tell him what we propose to do, as the matter was arranged by you."

"Tell him yourself," said Anita, "I shall look at the furniture and rooms while you are about it. It is really very pretty here, thanks to me, as the gentleman didn't care to have the furniture; and I know some one who would take it off his hands and give him three thousand francs profit. Ah! there is his correspondence," added the blonde, catching sight, upon the table, of Savinien's letter to M. de Trémorin.

"Stop where you are!" cried Fougeray, coming forward to prevent an unpardonable act of indiscretion.

"Did you suppose that I was going to read it? I was not brought up at the convent of the Sacred Heart, but I know how to behave myself. I shall sit down on this sofa and I won't open my lips while we are here, so that you may not accuse me of meddling with your friend's love affairs again. But give me a cigarette to help me to endure the fine speech you are going to make to him."

She acted as she said. She lighted at Savinien's lamp a cigarette handed to her by George, and extended herself upon a Turkish divan, which, as fate would have it, was placed quite close to the door of the bed-room.

Savinien, out of patience, was thinking of the agony endured by the unfortunate woman who was only protected by a slight partition from Anita's impertinence, and who from the apartment to which she had fled must hear every word articulated in the smoking-room.

"Tell me," said George to his friend, "where have you been these last two days? No one has seen you at the club, and I went to look for you at all the restaurants which a man who has a nice little pile of thousand franc notes in his desk would be likely to patronise."

"I am at liberty to dine where I please, and to spend my evenings elsewhere than at your club," replied Savinien, moodily.

"You are, indeed, my dear fellow, but it is quite natural that your friends should regret your absence and be uneasy about you. Twenty people have asked after you, and among them, these two gentlemen whom I met just now at the Champs-Élysées circus. As I could tell them nothing as to what had become of you, Anita, who was with them, had an idea."

"My idea was a bad one," exclaimed the blonde. "If I had foreseen how we should be received, I beg of you to believe that I should have taken you home with me, instead of coming to the Rue Rembrandt."

"Then it is to this young lady that I am indebted for your visit?" said Savinien, with a constrained smile.

"This is what happened: We were dying to have a game at cards, all of us, including Anita, who, as you know, is not performing, and as she could not go to the club, she kindly offered us a game and supper at her house. The proposal was received with enthusiasm. We recruited, on the spot, two or three heavy players and several little feminine friends of Anita's, who have promised to be at her house exactly as twelve o'clock strikes. We shall sup after our game, and I'll answer for it we shall have a gay time. I thought that you would willingly join us, and that we should perhaps find you at home, as you did not appear to be anywhere else. The motion was unanimously carried. Anita took me in her victoria. Boisguérin got into Glébof's brougham, and here we are!"

"Fougeray forgets that Glébof and I were a little bit excited," added the *attaché*. "We had drunk four bottles of Arbois at dinner. I tell you that, my dear sir, as an excuse for our noisy invasion. I went so far as to tap on your window, and I beg you to overlook that college boy's freak."

"It was very amusing," stammered Viscount d'Amaulis, who wished to appear to take the joke in good part, in order that all might end the sooner.

"Then you will come with us?" said George.

"No. I thank you, gentlemen, for having thought of inviting me, but——"

"But what? You had not gone to bed, as you said you had, when we rang, since you are still fully dressed. You have only to take your hat and cane. Anita's house is but two steps from here. I will walk there with you."

"It is impossible. I have letters to write."

"To your relations in Brittany? You have plenty of time for that, the mail does not go till to-morrow evening. Eighteen hours before you is more than you need, it seems to me, to write all your letters."

"I am tired, and I don't care to be up all night."

"Ah! viscount! viscount!" cried Anita, resuming the liveliness that suited her so well, "how wrong you would be to refuse! You don't know what you would lose. I told two of my lady friends, who are dying to meet you, that I expected a gentleman from Brittany. They will ask what has become of you, and I should have to tell them the truth, as they would never be satisfied with a put-off."

"You can tell them, my dear, that I am longing for sleep."

"No, no! I shall tell them that you were not alone, and that to their company you prefer that of a person whom we intruded upon, and who must be having a very unpleasant time of it just now."

"I tell you again that you are mistaken."

"Of course you are," said George, addressing the blonde. "If our friend were making love to any one he would not have begun a letter to his uncle."

"My dear friend," said the Russian, drawing out his words, "you are wrong to miss this game. There is a pile of cash to win. The Swede has agreed to hold out as long as we like."

"The Swede! What Swede?" asked Savinien, eagerly.

"My children, I have another idea—that makes two this evening," cried the fair Anita, not hesitating to take the words out of Glébof's mouth just as he was about to mention the name of the fine player to whom

he alluded. "Since Viscount d'Amaulis will not come to my house, why shouldn't we have our entertainment here? He only took possession here this evening. It seems to me that this is an excellent chance for a house-warming. Oh, don't be afraid, Glébof, you shall have your baccarat all the same! The Swedish count will go to my house at about eleven. My maid will send him here, as well as the supper which I ordered at the Café Anglais as we passed by."

"How you talk, my girl!" cried George. "Do you imagine that the Scandinavian lord is at your orders?"

"Every one who makes love to me is at my orders," replied Anita, majestically.

"Everybody knows that he is making love to you, but I don't believe that he will agree to bring his bank and his person to the rooms of our friend Savinien, who has not invited him and scarcely knows him. I doubt it the more as he is by no means a pleasant person, this Count Aparanda. He is as stiff as a pole, and scarcely polite."

"He is not at all polite," said Glébof. "I think, however, that he would willingly come here if he thought he could find some heavy players."

"Be that as it may," said M. de Boisguérin; "it is best to know before sending for him whether the new arrangement would suit Monsieur d'Amaulis."

"If the Swede doesn't suit him, we will do without the Swede," answered the blonde. "I will send word to that gentleman that I shall not be at home any more, and he may then go and play cards wherever he pleases. Albine and Lucie will come, and we seven will be quite as many as need be. Here is a table that looks as though it were made expressly for baccarat. As for the supper, there is a dining-room, and we can light it up as brightly as though it were day-time. Everything will be brought from the Café Anglais!"

"What do you say, Savinien?" asked George Fougerey.

Savinien was cursing Anita and her plans, which placed him in such cruel embarrassment. Nothing of all this suited him, but he saw that he would be obliged to choose one of the two proposals. He did not wish to have this foreigner brought unceasingly in his way by the chances of Parisian life. The best way to avoid him was not to go to Anita's house, for it was scarcely likely that the count would humour the misplaced whim of the crazy creature, and she on her side was quite ready to dispense with his society if M. d'Amaulis was unwilling to receive him.

On the other hand, however, how could he refuse to accompany her, now that she had declared her resolution to remain all night with her party in his rooms? This would be still worse, for Madame Montauron, blockaded in the bed-room, would thus be condemned to remain, who could say how long? When a warmly-contested game is being played, no one can tell when it will end. It ends as fate pleases, sometimes not until the morrow, or the day after that morrow. Gamblers have been known to hold their cards during sixty hours, and to ruin the banker's wife for ever it would suffice that baccarat should last till dawn, for she could not enter her house by daylight, or escape while the actress was still in the rooms.

To cross the garden it was necessary to walk through the smoking-room, where the guests were. The bed-room had a window, but it was some height above the ground, and the leap would have been dangerous. Besides, it was necessary to consider that a noise would be made by opening the

window. The poor woman's situation was truly intolerable, for in her dark hiding-place everything could be heard. The talkers spoke very loud, and the insupportable Anita had placed herself close to the bed-room door, so that all her disjointed gabble reached Madame Montauron's ears. And, as if by excess of fatality, the blonde and her friends were now talking of a man who was the subject of the saddest thoughts on the part of the lady of the casket.

George Fougeray had just pronounced the name of Count Aparanda, and a discussion was going on as to whether it was best to send for him or to let him know by message that the game of cards was postponed.

Savinien asked himself what at this moment could be the mental state of the imprudent woman who had again staked her reputation in the effort to regain possession of her casket. It was certain that she must hope that this foreigner, who was so mysteriously mixed up in her life, would not be brought into one of the rooms where she was concealed, and if she had ever loved him, even admitting that she loved him no more, it would be heartrending to her to be present, an invisible witness of a gay meeting at which he would be the attraction to the expected women.

Madame Montauron wished to see him again, no doubt; she had said so, and as the viscount was not disposed to assist her in doing so she had expressed a wish to know where he lived. The idea suddenly struck Savinien that if, as he presumed, she was listening to the conversation, she must be hoping that he would accept the invitation to go to Anita's house to play and take supper. She must wish him to take this determination not only because the retreat of the invaders would enable her to fly, but because she also hoped that, touched by her prayer, he would consent to profit by the opportunity to ascertain the address and daily habits of Count Aparanda.

The noisy arrival of the importunate troop of merrymakers had interrupted the narrative which she had begun of her youth's misfortunes, but she had said enough to lead Savinien to think that she was not undeserving of interest. Had she not mentioned Monsieur de Tremorin's name? Had she not spoken of the baron as of a friend who had come to her rescue after an error, the nature of which she had not had time to tell, but which must have been a serious misfortune, since after so many years she was still suffering from its consequences?

All these thoughts passed through the mind of Yvonne's cousin in a few seconds, and when the black-eyed blonde again appealed to him, he was almost on the point of sacrificing his night's rest to compel the intruders to leave his house. By consenting to go to Anita's house he would get this creature and her followers out of the rooms, and enable Madame Montauron to escape during his absence; and, besides, it would be the most feasible plan for leading the party to believe that there was no one in his rooms.

"Well, what shall I do to enable you to enjoy yourself, oh! you most undecided of viscounts?" asked the actress. "Shall I send my coachman to tell my servants that we will sup here, or will you deign to honour by your august presence the miserable dwelling of your very humble servant? I await your reply, my lord, and your will shall be law; but I declare that your choice goes no further, either here or at my house! Don't hope to get out of it in any other way. I hold you, and I shall not let you go."

"Well, then, I yield," answered Viscount d'Amaulis, in as careless a tone as he could assume,

"Bravo ! we shall sup here !"

"No, you would be ill at ease, and I don't wish to trouble your guests to come here. Besides, I wish to see your palace."

"Excellent ! You are very kind, and you shall be rewarded. I predict for you no end of good luck at cards. You will beggar the Swede."

"And it will be a good deed," answered Glébof, who, being a Russian, did not fancy Swedes.

"He owes you your revenge," insisted M. de Boisguérin.

"I knew that he would come," said George Fougeray. "Two days of virtuous seclusion are enough, my lad ! There is a time for everything. Come, are you ready ?"

Anita had risen, and the gentlemen were waiting for her to lead the way. Savinien pretended to look for his overcoat and hat, which were in the ante-room. He was not yet absolutely resolved to go off. He was thinking of his prisoner, and wondered whether she had preserved enough coolness to understand the situation, and to realise that although he abandoned it, it was in reality to save her.

Would she have enough nerve to escape without his help. Escape seemed by no means difficult. Madame Montauron knew the passage through the garden, and had only to leave the room as soon as there was no longer any one there. Savinien, after some further hesitation, concluded that she was fully able to get out of the difficulty alone, and he announced that he was ready to go off with the assembled party.

"Indeed I shall not be sorry," he said aloud, so that Madame Montauron might hear him, "to win back the money that this Count Aparanda won from me the other evening at the club, and as I do not care to receive him at my house, I thank you for having called here for me."

"The question is whether you will thank us after the game of cards is played," said Glébof ; "the count is very lucky at play."

"And now, to the Tower of Nesle !" quoted the actress, seizing hold of the viscount's arm, and he suffered himself to be led away without even turning his head in the direction of the bed-room.

"You see that our friend had no woman in his apartments," said George Fougeray, laughing.

"I hope," thought Savinien, "that there will be no woman there when I return, and, indeed, that she will never come here again."

## VII.

SAVINIEN, since his arrival in Paris, had passed from one surprise to another, and that which he experienced on entering Anita's house surpassed many a previous one of them. He knew very well that now-a-days actresses and "irregulars" are often much better lodged than more deserving women, and that many of them own landed property. But he imagined that the landed property of this frivolous princess of the footlights must be a sort of sugar-plum box, a quilted nest, so to speak, or what was formerly called "a folly ;" that is to say, a small house run up in some retired quarter to hide the love affairs of some nobleman. However, he saw a superb mansion, facing a wide boulevard in the heart of Paris—a house which would not have appeared insignificant even beside that belonging to M. Montauron, although it was less vast and not, like his

erected between a princely court and an almost regal park. The interior corresponded with the promises held out by the exterior. The tasteful luxury began in the vestibule, which was full of exotics. The walls of the staircase, which was as wide as that of some museum, were lined with pictures of undoubted value. There was a library, two dining-rooms, one for winter and one for summer, reception-rooms and boudoirs hung with silk, with a dressing-room and a bath-room which were spoken of as wonders in Boulevardian society.

Needless to say, moreover, that there were stables and a coach-house, servants in livery, and a stylishly-attired maid ; indeed, all the accessories required in the establishment of a pretty woman of good taste who has plenty of money to spend.

Anita had good sense enough to take no notice of the astonishment which she did not fail to perceive on the face of her provincial guest, but she took great pleasure in showing him all her splendours, from her picture gallery to her jewel boxes. George Fougeray assisted her in making his friend acquainted with refinements of life which proved entirely new to the gentleman from Brittany. The viscount was indeed so absorbed in the contemplation of Anita's luxurious surroundings that he soon forgot Madame Montauron and the peril she was in, or, if he remembered her, it was only to conclude that she had returned to her husband's house. It is true, moreover, that Anita's entertainment turned out quite differently to what either she or her guests had calculated. They had intended arranging a game at cards, but to make up a game worth mentioning a heavy player must hold the bank.

Now, Count Aparanda had not yet appeared, and none of the players present cared to take the often lucrative, but always perilous, place of dealer against all the others. George Fougeray himself was the first to propose to substitute a lively chat for baccarat until supper-time. The Russian and the *attaché* agreed with the suggestion, and Anita also, so that Savinien guessed that this gay party had designs upon the Swede's purse, and had met with the hope of emptying it. "Here as elsewhere," thought Yvonne's cousin, "the Golden Pig is the object of adoration, as in my dream."

Albine and Lucie, Anita's friends, had objected at first. They would have been content to win a few louis from the gentlemen present, but the latter did not appear disposed to part with any coin, and so, fearing to be taken for needy adventuresses, the two young women abstained from insisting upon playing.

Lucie was a serious-looking brunette with very high-set eyebrows, which gave her a look of perpetual surprise ; while Albine was a blonde with a tip-tilted nose, who laughed every moment to display her teeth. Both resembled the pen-portraits that Savinien had read of them in those newspapers which indulge in descriptions of the petty actresses and "irregulars" of Paris and their surroundings. They interested him but little.

Anita, however, attracted him as an unsolved problem fascinates a mathematician, and he allowed himself to study her more attentively than an engaged man should have done. The strange creature well knew how, when it suited her, to affect the speech and manner of a woman of good birth. She treated him with marked courtesy, after having, as she phrased it, "talked slang" to him at times when it had suited her to show herself to be no better than she was.

Now that she devoted herself to him with many engaging smiles, and assumed the manners of a great lady so well that she might really have been taken for one, he forgave her for having made game of him at the auction rooms, and invaded his bachelor apartment. Supper completed his reconciliation with the ideas of the period, and it would not have required any great effort to have brought him to the point of confessing that the worship of the idol he so greatly despised has, after all, its merits. He was new, indeed, to the choice elegances of the life of the princesses of the footlights, and the supper-service and the display of flowers astonished him greatly.

The wines and viands all came from the Café Anglais, but the china was Dresden, the glasses were crystal, flecked with gold spots, the napkins were of Russian linen, and the table-cloth of Chinese satin, woven with coloured flowers, and evidently made to order purposely for Anita. The table was decked, moreover, with a great display of flowers, but there was no massive silver-plate, as at a provincial dinner given to show off wealth and to prove that it is not newly acquired; still, Anita had plenty of money to spend.

She had placed Viscount d'Amaulis on her right; she made every effort to captivate him, and succeeded. The beauty of the black-eyed blonde, the gay chat of the guests, the fine wines from the celebrated cellar of the restaurant in the Rue Marivaux, all combined to intoxicate him, although his head was strong. In Brittany, he had sometimes taken far more wine, but then he had never heard conversation so calculated to upset the brain.

Anita started the conversation, and all sorts of subjects were talked of; high life and high livers, popular actresses and circus-riders, eccentric foreigners and "irregulars." Parisian private life was discussed, scandalous adventures related, everything was known, and everything told.

Savinien, for the first time in his life, saw the back side of life as a play might be seen from the slips. He almost blushed at knowing so much less about such matters than his old college chum. For George Fougerey, however, Paris had no more secrets to be discovered.

It depended upon Savinien himself to become fully acquainted with this Paris in which he was now taking his first steps, and the people about him asked nothing better than to show it to him under all its aspects. He felt that he could soon become an adept and rapidly distance George, who could have no footing in the society which received the last of the Amaulis with open arms. He indeed felt a desire to rush wildly into it, and experienced flashes of vanity, feverish longings, which made him forget his wise determinations, precisely as he had forgotten the letter which he had begun to write to his uncle.

Matters had reached that psychological point when persons say whatever comes into their heads, when a gentleman who had not been invited by the lady of the house, although she was well acquainted with him, was suddenly announced. The guests had some knowledge of him. This unexpected and late arrival was none other than the under-manager of the Provincial Bank, the inevitable financier Bouret, whom Savinien met everywhere, and whose life was divided between business and pleasure. He was received with acclamations.

On such occasions a gay companion always meets with a warm reception, and M. Bouret had the reputation of being a thorough gay liver. He

had been at one time an intimate friend of Anita's. He was well acquainted with Albine and Lucie, he treated George Fougerey with the familiarity that a general shows to a soldier who may become an officer, and this was by no means the first occasion on which he found himself in noisy company with the Russian and the *attaché*. All liked his gaiety and easy good humour. Anita remembered him with pleasure, and her two friends were disposed to like all pleasant and liberal individuals.

Viscount d'Amaulis was the only person who felt no pleasure at sight of Monsieur Montauron's coadjutor. For several days past he could go nowhere without encountering him, but he was obliged to put a good face on the matter, and did not show his annoyance.

"You will ask me how it happens I have come here, and how I know that our dear madcap was giving an entertainment," said the newcomer, after having shaken hands with every one present. "It is easy to guess. I met that tall fellow Pontaurmur who was coming from the circus——"

"And he told you that I had made up a game," interrupted Anita. "He was near us when we arranged it near the stables, and he was furious because I didn't invite him. No indeed! He is very tiresome, and, besides, he would have wanted to bring Blanche Taupier with him."

"Oh! horrors, no!" exclaimed Albine and Lucie, who did not like competitors.

"I did not tell him that I intended to invite myself," said Bouret. "I skilfully manœuvred till I got rid of him. Then I went round to my club where I had a stupid time of it, and at two o'clock I told my coacaman to drive me to the Boulevard Malesherbes. Have I done wrong?"

"No! no!" eagerly replied the guests of both sexes, in chorus.

"I see that I have come at a good time. Now, I need two bottles of Moët's Brut Impérial to be as merry as you are."

"Drink them, then," said Anita, gravely.

"Thanks. I could drink four without rolling under the table, but one must think of the morrow, you know, and I have three business appointments before twelve."

"Would you like some supper?"

"Oh, no, you have finished, and I think that you must be dying to go at something else. Pontaurmur said that you had found a player to make up a bank, a gentleman who has just come from the North Pole, with millions in his pocket. I presume that you mean to win them."

"We are reckoning without our host," said George Fougerey. "The polar individual has thought fit to abstain from appearing."

"He has broken his promise," exclaimed the lady of the house, "and I vow he shall repent of it!"

"You will make him pay dearly for it, and you will do right," replied George, "but we shall have no revenge for his rudeness, as the absence of the capitalist breaks up our game. Unless, indeed, Monsieur Bouret will lay fifty thousand francs on the table," he added, laughing.

"That is a good idea," cried Anita. "Come, Bouret, make up a bank for us; you ought to know how to play banker, as that is your business."

"Not at night-time. I am a banker from nine till five only. What would the shareholders of the Provincial Bank say if they heard I was a baccarat player? Baron de Trémorin would withdraw his confidence from us."

"I shan't be the person to betray you to him," said Savinien, laughing.



"I am sure of that, viscount, and I won't betray you if you take the Swede's place to please these gentlemen. Between ourselves you would do as well, for you are very lucky at ventures. To make a hundred thousand francs the first time one sets foot at the Bourse is a sign of luck, or else I don't know what I am talking about. But, now that I speak of your profits, how do you like my upholsterer?"

"Very much. I was able to move in to-day."

"And he is delightfully lodged," said Anita. "The furniture looks quite fresh, the rooms are pleasant——"

"So you have seen them?" interrupted Bouret. "Bless me! you've lost no time in behaving in a neighbourly fashion to Monsieur d'Amaulis."

"It was all as it should be, my dear sir! Ask Monsieur Fougeray."

"True," replied George, "there were four of us: Boisguérin, Glébof, Anita, and I, and we paid a visit to Savinien, who received us very badly."

"So badly that I thought he had a lady with him," resumed Anita.

"He wouldn't come with us at first, but at last we carried him off."

"Oh, I only resisted for form's sake," exclaimed Viscount d'Amaulis who feared the indiscreet tongue of M. Bouret. "I was alone, as you all know."

"You will allow me to call on you," said the under-manager. "To-morrow I shall have to go and see Monsieur Montauron, in the afternoon, most likely; I know that he is as anxious as I am to see how your ground-floor looks. We have only to pass through his park and your garden, and we will profit by the occasion."

"Don't take the trouble to-morrow," said Savinien, who had not forgotten that Madame Montauron's messenger would call at three o'clock for the casket. "I am going out early in the morning, and shan't return till the evening to dress. I am going to visit Monsieur Montauron."

"True, it will be Friday. Well, as you won't be at home I will put off my visit till another time."

"Gentlemen," said Albine, laughing to show her white teeth, "you are not in the least amusing. Instead of complimenting one another, you would do better to draw lots as to who shall make up a bank. Oh! we don't want to ruin you! A hundred louis, fifty louis, whatever you like, so long as the women win; and it will be all the better for you, for that Count Aparanda would have cleared you all out, I am sure of it."

"She is right," cried George, "and as these ladies want a bank I am ready to make up a small one."

"That's right!" sighed Lucie. "When I do not play after supper I feel ill."

"Then, my children," said Anita, rising, "let us go into the drawing-room. The table is quite ready there for the game."

All the guests rose with her, and Savinien, who had not yet completely lost his head, had the wise thought of profiting by this interval "between the acts" to disappear, English fashion, without taking leave of any one. He did not wish to begin a game which could only interest the women present, and which might, all the same, last till dawn if one of them lost and wished to recover her losses. He preferred to return home to assure himself that Madame Montauron was no longer there, and also to have a little sleep; for he needed rest after all the night's emotions, and must also be ready in the morning to go to the Provincial Bank in search of the famous casket.

But it was written that he should not so easily escape the temptations

of Anita's supper-party. While the remaining guests were returning to the drawing-room, and he was manœuvring to reach the ante-room noiselessly, M. Bouret, who had remained behind, took his arm familiarly, and said: "Did you know that this Count Aparanda was your neighbour before you moved?"

"Where?" asked the viscount, who knew very well, but did not expect this question.

"Why you were, without knowing it, in the same hotel as he, and I will tell you how I became aware of it. You remember that we recognised him at the auction-rooms from having met him at the gate of our vaults, where he came to deposit a trunk for which he would have had to pay a good deal as overplus fare if he had been going to Sweden."

"Yes—well, what of it?"

"Well, although Fougeray told me his name, I had the curiosity to look at the subscription register, and I saw that he had given his address as No. 9 Rue du Helder."

"Then I wasn't mistaken," said Savinien. "I did think that I had seen him crossing the hotel courtyard. I fancy that I mentioned it to you."

"True. I remember now. You added that he left with his luggage in a cab."

"He left the house, I am sure. How did he happen to tell your clerk that he lived there."

"I really cannot say. Perhaps he intended to return there."

"I don't believe it. The proof of this is that he was buying some furniture at the Rue Drouot sale."

"These foreigners do everything in their own way! Well, if this one doesn't live at the hotel, he must live somewhere, and——"

"I should like to know where," interrupted the viscount.

"Why? Does he owe you any money?" asked M. Bouret, with a laugh.

At this moment a servant entering the drawing-room announced: "Count Aparanda!"

The under-manager of the Provincial Bank had gradually drawn Viscount d'Amaulis towards the folding door of the drawing-room, both leaves of which were open. They could, therefore, without need of advancing, observe the entrance of the Swedish count, who arrived just at the moment when he had been given up.

He was received like a man in debt receives the bearer of a letter full of bank-notes. He must have enough money about him to fill everybody's pockets, and it was well known that he asked nothing better than to hold the bank. The first ventures he had made in card-playing since his arrival in Paris had been lucky; indeed, since he had been admitted to the Plungers' Club, he had always come off winner. Still, luck changes, and must change, by the very nature of things, and every one hoped that it would change that night.

Anita herself forgot that she had been abusing the truant, and made him cordially welcome. She did not, like her friends, so greatly wish to make a few louis at baccarat, still she seemed to be desirous of pleasing her guest.

"What do you think of all this enthusiasm, my dear viscount?" said Bouret, with a mocking laugh. "Just now they were speaking of this foreigner with the utmost scorn. One would have thought that if he had dared to show his face he would be shown the door, and now they all but

bear him in triumph. The men are shaking hands with him, and the women are almost ready to fall into his arms."

"It is his purse that they are welcoming," replied Savinien.

"Of course. I think he is perfectly well aware of that; for he takes all this homage with a sarcastic dignity, which shows that he is more cunning than any of they are. One would swear that he was saying to himself, 'He laughs longest who laughs last.'"

"That's true, and I wonder that my friend George does not perceive it."

"Oh, Fougerey is able to take care of himself. Besides, he may be thinking of having some business transactions with him at a later date. He would be wrong in that. Foreigners now-a-days wear a coat of mail, as it were, and ill betide any one who looks out for a weak place in it."

"Then you have some suspicions as to this man?"

"Suspicions! No, not more than as to many other gentleman-exotics who swarm about clubs and visit the houses of actresses and 'irregulars.' These birds appear and disappear like swallows, and none know whence they come or whither they go. They don't leave their plumage in Paris, at all events; quite the contrary. So much the worse for the simpletons who have to deal with them."

"That is my opinion also, and I shall take care to have nothing to do with this gentleman. He doesn't look as though he amounted to much."

"You have the more reason to mistrust him, as he has, if I am not mistaken, already fleeced you. But if you care to know his address, this is a good chance. I am going to find it out from him, unless it suits you better to ask it of him yourself."

"No; I know him too little to allow myself to question him. Besides, it was mere curiosity on my part. It seems strange to me that he should give out that he is at the Rue du Helder hotel when he is no longer there. That is all."

"It is, indeed, strange. I must amuse myself by questioning him, if only for the pleasure of embarrassing him, or at least annoying him."

"Whatever you do," said Savinien, eagerly, "be kind enough not to bring me into the matter."

"Don't be alarmed. I will take it all upon myself. Let me speak. We shall have some fun."

"What! are you plotting together?" asked the lady of the house.

"Don't you see that we have our banker now? Bouret, you need not worry any more now; and you, viscount, will have a formidable adversary. Let me introduce you both. That surprises you, eh? as I told you the other day at the sale in the Rue Drouot that I did not know Count Aparanda. Learn, however, that we are now old friends. Are we not, count?" concluded Anita, with a captivating look at the Swede, who bowed by way of assent. She now took his hand, stepped aside with him, and they talked apart, while the guests grouped themselves round the card-table so as to lose no more time.

"I have already met this gentleman at the club," said Savinien to Anita, in a low tone.

"True! I had forgotten it," exclaimed the black-eyed blonde. "I remember being told that the count had won some money of you at the Plungers' Club. Well, he now offers you a revenge, and you must accept it. That is as it should be! I must now introduce Bouret."

"Thanks, my dear friend," said the financier. "I had rather intro-

duce myself, the more as I have just a little information to ask of this gentleman."

"Of me?" muttered the foreigner, frowning.

"Oh, it is nothing! a mere trifle of which I stand in need as manager of the Provincial Bank."

Savinien, who was observing Count Aparanda, thought that he saw him turn somewhat pale.

"We have already met without your remarking it," resumed Bouret.

"Where, if you please?" asked the foreigner, drily.

"At the entrance of the deposit vaults. One morning at the beginning of this week you came to bring a chest to us. I say 'us,' because I am under-manager of the establishment, of which my friend Montauron is the director. Your chest was brought in by a porter, who carried it on his back. You came to the gate just as I was going out."

"I remember now. It seems to me that you were not alone."

"No; I was in the company of Viscount d'Amaulis, who brought us a deposit also, less voluminous than yours, let me say. His was a casket, yours a chest, but they are side by side in Nos. 918 and 919. You are neighbours."

Aparanda looked at Bouret and Savinien with a degree of attention which showed that the coincidence was not a matter of indifference to him.

"I am delighted to hear it," said he, in a somewhat sarcastic tone.

"Will you be kind enough to tell me, however, what this all has to do with the information you need of me?"

"Ah, yes! In giving your name to the clerk who delivers the subscription tickets you indicated your residence as No. 9 Rue du Helder."

"Certainly. Wasn't this formality necessary?"

"So necessary that we require notification of any change of address. You understand why. A depositor may die. In that case we apprise the heirs."

"That is all very well, sir. When I change my address I will let you know."

"Good; but you have not let us know this time."

"How 'this time?'"

"You are no longer staying at the Rue du Helder."

"What do you know about that?" asked the Swede, abruptly.

"I learned by chance that you are not," replied M. Bouret, without heeding the look on Savinien's face. "Viscount d'Amaulis was in the same hotel as you; he left it to-day, and he tells me that you left it before he did."

"Monsieur d'Amaulis really troubles himself too much about my movements, and I should be greatly obliged if he will explain."

"How I came to speak of you," interrupted Savinien, who mentally sent M. Bouret to Hades, but felt it impossible to recoil now that the question was broached, "I will tell you. When I met you at the entrance of the vaults, I recognised you as having seen you that same morning crossing the courtyard of the hotel where I was staying. You took a vehicle with your luggage. I mentioned the matter to this gentleman without attaching the slightest importance to it."

"And I," resumed Bouret, "do not attach any more importance to it than he does. But when the list of fresh depositors was presented to me, and I saw your name——"

"How did you guess that the name was that of the depositor who was in the vaults when you came down there?" interrupted the Swede.

"Your name is followed by your address, and I knew that Monsieur d'Amaulis lived in the Rue du Helder. I made up my mind at once, and I promised myself that I would ask you to rectify the statement made on our register. I could not write to you, as I did not know your new address, but I thought that I should be likely to meet you somewhere. I did meet you at the auction-rooms, but the place would have been ill-chosen to accost you, and besides, Monsieur Fougeray, who was with me, told me that you had become a member of his club. I then knew where to address you, and I was in no hurry, as it is a mere matter of form. Now that I have mentioned the mistake to be rectified, it will suffice if you send a note to-morrow to the office of the Provincial Bank, a note with——"

"Oh! it is useless to wait till to-morrow. I am now at the Grand Hôtel," interrupted Count Aparanda. "I did not know whether I could find a room to suit me there, when I came to your banking-house——"

"And so you gave us your old address? That is quite natural. Let us say no more about it, count. I will see that the correction is made."

Savinien, on the contrary, thought that nothing could be less natural; but he now had the address which Madame Montauron so much desired, and he forgave all M. Bouret's babble as it had resulted in enabling him to procure this information.

Anita had listened absently to what to her was most uninteresting conversation. However, she had had the politeness to abstain from interrupting; but when she heard Bouret's conclusion she lost no time in reminding her guests that they were being waited for to play baccarat.

Albine and Lucie had already taken their places, one on the right the other on the left of the chair reserved for the banker. They were now engaged in spreading out upon the table a few louis which they hoped to increase. Glébof, who could not play without drinking—this was a "fetish" for luck—was busy in placing near the chair which he had appropriated a little side-table with various liquors upon it.

Boisguérin was armed with a rake which he was brandishing to see how far it would reach, while waiting till he could use it to rake in the Swede's money. Fougeray was opening the sealed packs of cards which the lady of the house had procured with admirable forethought. All that was wanting was Count Aparanda, detained, to the great annoyance of the would-be players, by the prolonged explanation just given.

The women were muttering complaints, and the men were sending Bouret to the devil for taking up the banker's time.

"I would bet anything that animal is proposing some sort of business transaction to him," grumbled George Fougeray. "He won't play himself, and he keeps us from playing. There's that simpleton Amaulis keeping the thing up! He must have something to find out about that Swede. I have noticed two or three times already that he was very much interested in the gentleman, and I will find out why before I have done."

"Is this all that you wished to ascertain from me?" said the foreigner, scornfully, looking M. Bouret full in the face.

"There is nothing further," replied the under-manager.

"That is fortunate, and you will allow me to remark that your banking-house does not fulfil what it promises to its depositors."

"How is that? Have you any doubt as to the inviolability of our

vaults? You closed your compartment yourself. Your chest is there, and nobody can open it but yourself."

"I daresay; but I thought that secrecy was a part of your programme, and I perceive that you do not consider yourselves bound to keep your subscribers' secrets."

"Yes we do! yes we do! the list of subscribers is known to us alone."

"I beg your pardon! You have just told Monsieur d'Amaulis that I am down upon it. I hasten to add that it is quite indifferent to me, and that I make no secret of having hired one of your compartments to deposit some valuables; but for the sake of the principle I call attention to the fact, that one of the directors of the Provincial Bank speaks of his customers' business outside of his office. You will admit that this manner of understanding their interests has its drawbacks. Monsieur d'Amaulis, for instance, may not like it any better than myself."

"Why not, sir?" demanded Savinien, abruptly.

"It was at least idle to tell me that you made a deposit on the same day, and side by side with mine. Your affairs are no concern of mine."

"Nor do yours interest me, that is perfectly true; but it matters little to me that you should know of my relations with the Provincial Bank," replied Savinien, who did not speak as he felt.

"If this is a lesson you are attempting to teach me," resumed Bouret, "I have but one reply to give you: you are free to remove your chest if you don't think that it is in safety with us."

"I know that, sir, and I shall soon make use of my freedom to do so," replied Count Aparanda, turning his back upon the under-manager.

Anita had left the talkers to join the players and calm their impatience.

"At last!" cried she, seeing the foreigner draw near the table, "your conference is at an end. That is fortunate, indeed! I thought that Bouret was giving these gentlemen a lecture on financial administration."

"I am here, my dear madame," said the Swede; "and if I am wanted to take the bank, I am ready to do so."

"Wanted? I should think so, indeed!" replied Fougeray; "we implore you to do so! We sigh at your absence. If you had stayed much longer, Boisguérin would have plunged his rake into his body, Glébof would have finished that bottle of Kummel which he has begun drinking, and, as he is fearfully far gone already, the effect would have been disastrous; Lucie would have withered where she stands, and Albine would have torn out her lovely light-brown hair."

"Be still, my dear fellow," said the *attaché*. "You are preventing Count Aparanda from stating how much money he puts in the bank."

"Say what it shall be yourselves, gentlemen," said the Swede, taking possession of the seat placed ready for him at the table.

"Is thirty thousand too much?" asked the Russian.

"Certainly not. I won as much at the club the other evening, and I have the money about me. You will allow me to add a hundred louis to amuse these ladies."

"That is as it should be. The count is a well-bred foreigner," exclaimed Albine.

"He is charming," sighed the languishing Lucie, with a long look at the Swede.

While the latter was placing two rolls of gold and three packets of bank-notes upon the table, Bouret stopped Viscount d'Amaulis to say: "What do you think of that fellow's impertinence?"

"I? Nothing," stammered Savinien.

"Don't you think that his susceptibility as regards our vaults is very strange? I cannot call upon him to take away his huge chest, though I half fancy that there is nothing but stones in it. Our rules oppose my doing so, but I will amuse myself by annoying him. I will send to-morrow to the Grand Hôtel to ask whether he really lives there, for I have an idea, I don't know why, that he has not yet given his real address."

"That would be very strange," said Savinien; "but, if you found out that he has deceived you, what should you do?"

"I should tell the story to everybody, and I would get Fongeray to tell it at the Plungers' Club. It would be well that you and all these gentlemen should know what sort of life this man leads. But, meantime, I have a great mind to attack his bank in a vigorous manner to show him that his high and mighty airs do not impose upon me. I don't often play, but when I do I play smartly, for ammunition isn't wanting. I should be delighted to win some coin from him. Shall we try it together?"

"I should be delighted, but I doubt our success. He has fiendish luck. I know that to my cost," sighed Savinien.

"Don't you think that he plays fair?"

"Oh! it isn't that."

"Oh! there would be nothing surprising about it, but I answer for it that if he tries to cheat I shall detect it at once. I have the sharpest eyes in the world for anything of that sort, and I would give fifty louis for the pleasure of catching this more or less genuine Scandinavian in the very act. Listen to me, and let us take the opportunity."

"Come, Savinien, your revenge!" cried George. "Come, my dear fellow, we win all we want here."

And, indeed, the first three rounds had been for the players, and the banker was now engaged in paying on all sides with perfect good humour.

"Twenty louis on the right," said Bouret, taking out his pocket-book.

"At last I recognise my Bouret," said Anita; "the Bouret whom I knew as a bold player before his greatness bound him to the shore," she quoted, as an additional comment, and turning to Savinien, she said: "Viscount, a serious man gives you the example. Follow it! Go and put twenty louis on the left and come and sit here by me. It is a lucky place."

Savinien had certainly not come to play, and regretted not having been able to escape, but things turned out in such a way that it had become difficult to refuse without appearing unreasonable. Besides, as the under-manager of the Provincial Bank allowed himself to play, Baron de Trémorin's nephew did not need to be squeamish. At heart, he would not have been sorry to win back from Count Aparanda a part of the money which he had lost to him, and he did not risk ruining himself, as he merely had about him three notes of a thousand francs each. He mentally resolved to sacrifice these, and so he followed Anita's advice by seating himself beside her and risking the stake which the volatile creature had challenged him to lay down. He won, and Bouret, who had played against him, lost.

The women were in luck, except Albine; but she had her own way of disposing her money in piles. When she lost three louis she managed to pay but one, and the banker had not the bad taste to appear to observe this. She was lucky on the following round, for every one won, the count having thrown baccarat. After a few changes the luck ran definitively

against Aparanda, and towards the end of the game his bank was nearly exhausted. The Viscount d'Amaulis had doubled the sum he had about him. M. Bouret, more fortunate and bolder, had won ten thousand francs, George, five or six thousand, M. de Boisguérin, four thousand, and the women, on their side, were more or less winners.

Anita thought it her duty, as the mistress of the house, to play moderately, but Albine and Lucie had become quite reckless.

The Russian, who was intoxicated, had contrived to lose, but it was only a trifle, so that there remained scarcely enough for the banker to hold out with, for any time at least, at the present rate of play. It was impossible not to do justice to Count Aparanda's bearing in face of this frightful ill-luck. He was as calm as when he had taken his seat at the card-table, and he smiled more and more. One would have sworn that it was a pleasure to him to pay.

Savinien, who was observing him, had not even surprised a single gesture indicative of ill-humour, or yet a cloud upon his face. Bouret, who also had his eye upon him with other thoughts than those of Yvonne's cousin, had his trouble for nothing. One could not really suspect a man of cheating when he had not yet once turned up eight or nine, and played baccarat at almost every throw.

"Finish me off, gentlemen!" he said, gaily. "I wish my bank had held out till the end of the round, so that I might give my place to some one luckier than myself."

This was the first time he had spoken since he had begun dealing.

"Count, you are the finest player that I ever saw," said the mistress of the house, with gravity.

"Not one of these gentlemen would take losses so coolly," muttered Lucie.

"Long live Sweden!" exclaimed the blonde Albine, who had just won forty louis.

The players of both sexes were preparing their stakes, when suddenly Bouret said to Savinien: "Viscount, shall we go banco between us?"

"Willingly," replied Savinien, who thought himself about to have a good run of luck.

The cards were dealt, and Count Aparanda showed a nine, accompanied by a court card. There was seven on the right, and six on the left. Bouret and Savinien had only to pay; there was no escape.

"Be good enough to count what you have before you," said M. Bouret, in a careless tone, which did not agree with the expression of his face.

It was found that there were seven thousand francs remaining before the count, and Savinien, for his share, had to give back all his winnings, besides several hundred francs of his capital. Had he consulted the sub-manager of the Provincial Bank, or even looked at him, he would probably have stopped playing, for he would have seen that Bouret was quietly folding up the notes which remained to him after this unlucky round to put them in his pocket-book.

However, Savinien was in the worst possible frame of mind for a man who plays against a bank. His self love was up in arms as though, upon a field of another kind, he had to fight against this foreigner who seemed predestined to be his adversary everywhere and always. He was as much humiliated as vexed at having lost, and to make up for this, his first check, he scornfully threw upon the table his two last thousand-franc notes. A fresh sweep carried them off in the twinkling of an eye, and, by some irony of fate, the right, having nine against the banker's eight, won.



Bouret, who had not played, rose, saying: "That is a warning, if I am any judge! Now, you won't win a louis more."

"That is a good excuse for going off with one's winnings," sneered Lucie.

"Your prophecies are very discouraging," said Anita.

"No, he is only playing Charlemagne," said Albine.

"Young ladies, in this world a man does what he can," replied Bouret calmly. "If I were not sure of losing, I shouldn't go."

"What! you are going to desert us?" cried the mistress of the house

"Business, my dear friend, business! I must be up at seven to-morrow morning."

"The gentleman is free to go, if he pleases," said Aparanda. "Besides, the deal is at an end; there are only five cards left; not enough for the deal; and so we can stop at once, if you wish it."

"No, not at all!" cried the players in chorus, excited by the winnings so easily obtained. No one but Viscount d'Amaulis had lost as yet.

"I am at the orders of the majority," said the Swede, graciously; "and if these gentlemen will take the trouble to shuffle the cards, I will deal as long as they like."

"That, now, is speaking like a true gentleman," exclaimed Lucie, in a paroxysm of enthusiasm.

While the process suggested by Count Aparanda was going on, Savinien rose to light a cigar, and to give himself a moment for reflection. The voice of reason bade him leave, and a feeling for which he could not account bade him stay. It was mingled vexation, wrath, and, above all, pride. It went against him to yield the field to the enemy, and it did not suit him to imitate the financier Bouret's prudent economy. Lucie's exclamation obscured Savinien's better judgment, and he did not realise that being "a gentleman" had nothing to do with the matter. However, M. Montauron's wary lieutenant took him aside and said to him:

"Will you allow me to give you a little advice, which, I fear, you won't take? This Swede seems to me to be a dangerous man. I think that he lost too much during that exceptional run of ill luck for it to be due only to chance, and if I were you, I should mistrust the coming onset. I see that you have made up your mind to go on, and I don't undertake to stop you; but if I were in your place, I would play for low stakes."

"Such is my intention," replied the viscount; "and it would be difficult for me to do otherwise, as I have but twenty louis left of the money I had with me."

"Oh, the Swede will take your word for whatever you wish to play for, and I strongly advise you not to adopt that way of playing with him. I am going home, and to-morrow I shall send to the Grand Hôtel to see whether this gentleman is staying there. I begin to be puzzled by his numerous changes of address and his overplus luggage. Good night, my dear viscount. If you have any leisure, come to chat with me at my office. Who knows," added Bouret, laughing, "whether you won't have occasion to open your casket to take out some money to pay your gambling debts? I hope not; but if it unfortunately so happens, I hope that you will come upstairs to see me before going down to the vaults."

This said, the lively manager of the Provincial Bank spun round on his heels and reached the door without being called back. The players were too busy with the game which was about to be resumed, and Savinien took good care not to prolong an interview in which the unfortunate

casket, which he had promised to return to Madame Montauron on the following afternoon, was again brought up. He had not time to think of what M. Bouret had said, for he was called for on all sides, and told that he only was waited for to recommence the game. He yielded, and it was in vain that he declared that he had no more money. He was obliged to sit beside Anita and burn up his last cartridges, which were rapidly consumed.

The new game was what is called in club slang the "razor game." An alarming run of luck began at once in favour of the banker, and the third sweep emptied Savinien's pockets. He would have easily consoled himself had he not seen that his friend George was coining money, so to speak, with his pencil. The far-seeing Anita had prepared a pile of pieces of paper to receive all amounts and names, and Fougerey had already reached this last resort of those whose pockets are drained.

The count declared that he would accept I O U's as though they were bullion, including even those signed by the ladies, and everybody now began to take advantage of this offer. The ladies risked little by putting their signature in circulation, and the men, mad with the fever of play, no longer calculated what might result from the facilities offered to them. It seemed as though Bouret's departure had taken away all the little good sense left in the room.

Every one was busy scribbling the amount he or she staked. Anita and her friends gave notes of five louis, Boisguérin of twenty-five, and Fougerey of fifty.

"Your turn, viscount!" said the lady of the house, passing Savinien some slips of paper, to be converted into I O U's, and a pretty gold pencil. She did this as though it had been the most natural thing in the world, and Savinien would have found it awkward to ask for an explanation. Besides, the viscount was no longer himself. It was not merely the feeling of appearing countrified which led him to play on parole. The demon of gambling had laid his claws upon him, and rather than give up playing he would have signed for any amount. He contented himself, however, with writing his name to ten notes of a thousand francs each, and promised himself that this should be all he would do.

Anita, who read them over his shoulder, exclaimed:

"That is right, viscount! Now you are in the swing. You really can't do less than your friend George, as you made as much as he did at the Bourse. The attack is fifty louis, that is all. People won't say, at all events, that we play like shop-keepers at my house."

Savinien could have dispensed with all these praises, but he scarcely heard them. His mind was entirely given to the game, which had begun again, after a short interruption needed to write the I O U's on the strips of paper. The signers soon saw that this interval had not changed Count Aparanda's luck. Nines and eights still fell from his fingers like hail from heaven. He made but one swoop for the first note laid down by Viscount d'Amaulis, who then laid down a second, and after that, a third.

The other players, equally unlucky, and as persistent as he, signed as fast as possible. The pencil was snatched up by one after another. The Swede, still imperturbable, classed the notes methodically, and it was obvious that his good luck did not make his mind less clear.

Each loser had now given his pile of paper, and when, by chance, Aparanda had to pay, he did not mix the notes. He gave each person the notes he had signed, as payment, and like a bank which carries to

account profits, losses, and doubtful debts, he classed the feminine signatures apart. He even allowed the ladies to take them back to avert the necessity of writing their pretty names too often; he contented himself with verbal promises from them, and this generosity cost him nothing, as he laid no stress upon their written engagements. Thanks to this course, they had no grudge against him for persistently winning.

But the serious players were not satisfied. The polite Boisguérin swore between his teeth. Glébof drank like a sponge, and growled like a bear. Fongeray was silent, but made nervous gestures, and it was easy to see that he was perfectly furious. Savinien, for his part, no longer knew what he was doing. He had forgotten all things, the past, the future, the wise advice of M. Bouret, Madame Montauron's sorrows, the manor of Plouër, and the vaults of the Provincial Bank. He only thought of struggling against the insolent luck of the foreigner who swept off everything from the table with exasperating regularity. He did not even regret the notes for thousands which were taking flight toward Sweden, and he did not stop to calculate their number.

The game ended as it had begun, and a last more disastrous and irritating round than all the rest carried off the final hopes of Viscount d'Amaulis, who had increased his stake tenfold in the hope of recovering himself.

This time, a kind of rage and silent anger seized him, shown neither by gesture nor by utterance. His fingers suddenly felt the medal of the Virgin, which he had worn ever since he had left Plouër. It had not brought him luck at play, this talisman given by Yvonne, but it preserved him from a worse misfortune than that of a heavy loss of money: it checked him on a road which might have ended in dishonour. For it would have been dishonour to have owed this odious foreigner a larger sum than he could have paid within twenty-four hours.

Savinien closed his eyes, and it seemed to him that he saw his cousin kneeling in the old church at Plouër, and repeating on his behalf the prayer for the shipwrecked.

He saw at last that the name of Amaulis was in danger, and that he must stop if he would save it. Count Aparanda gave him an opportunity to do so.

The triumphant Swede, after distributing the last card of the victorious deal, set himself quietly to counting the notes which he had captured.

"Have you enough of them?" ironically asked George.

"No, sir," replied the Swede, without apparent emotion. "I wish to go on, but I wish to know what I have won, and these gentlemen will be glad, also, to know what they have lost."

"I should be greatly obliged to you if you would count the notes which you hold with my name," said Savinien, rising; "I wish to stop now."

"The deuce, my dear fellow!" said Glébof; "you will break up the game."

"Why? You are free to remain; I am going."

"So am I," said Fongeray. "I have enough of a game in which not one point in ten can be made."

"The fact is," muttered Boisguérin, "that I never saw such a game as this."

"So much the more reason for getting back what we have lost," grumbled the Muscovite.

"Try if you like, I have no confidence in it," replied George.

The women kept a prudent silence. They felt that it was in vain to struggle against the count's luck, and they hoped he would tear up their notes. The rest mattered little to them.

Aparanda went on with what he was doing without disturbing himself to listen to the talk going on round about.

"Well, sir," said he to Viscount d'Amaulis, who had spoken first, "here are sixty-nine notes of fifty louis each. Be good enough to verify them."

"That is useless," replied Savinien, "you can give them back to me against the sixty-nine thousand francs which I owe you, and which I will send you in the morning to the Grand Hôtel."

"I should be sorry you took such trouble. I will place your notes, in the course of the day, in the cash-box at the club, and you can take them out whenever you please."

"Very well; you shall be paid this evening," replied Savinien, drily. And he turned his back upon the lucky Swede, who was now employed in counting the notes of the other players.

"My dear friend," said Anita to Savinien, "you know how to stop short after a heavy loss. That is very seldom the case, especially with beginners. I predict that you will make your fortune at play."

"No, for I shall play no more."

"Nonsense! you are sick of it just now, but you will get over that."

"I think not," replied the viscount, going towards the door.

She did not attempt to detain him, and he was able to get away without being observed. But George Fougeray joined him in the courtyard.

"A pretty night we've had of it!" cried he, clenching his hand and raising it to heaven. "I have lost just ten thousand less than you have lost. It was well worth while our making a splendid hit at the Bourse to enrich that rascal Aparanda! He is a rascal, that I'll bet any amount, and it would not surprise me if he had cheated. I must pay him, however, and I have not half the money that I owe him."

"How is that? I gave you nearly a hundred thousand francs."

"My dear boy, I have stopped up several gaps. I shall be obliged to borrow."

"If I had not lost everything, I should be glad to help you."

"Yes, indeed; I know that very well. But you cannot have much yourself after the unlucky run you have had to-night, coupled with the losses at the club."

"I believe that I shall not have anything left, for you remember that the furniture and the upholsterer take up a good deal."

"Fortunately, I know a good-natured money-lender who will lend us a thousand louis."

"Thank you; I shan't need them."

"Nonsense! you have no money left—you admit that yourself. What will you do? In Paris you cannot live on air."

"In Paris, no; but at Plouër my room is ready and my plate laid. When I am there I do without pocket-money."

"What! do you think of returning to Brittany?"

"Certainly. I even hope to be there before the end of the week."

"I don't believe a word of it! We will have a chat this evening, and you will change your mind. Meantime, I am going to bed, if I can only find a cab. I live the devil of a way off, but you are almost at your own door—ah! there's a cab over there. Good night."

George began running down the Boulevard Malesherbes, leaving Savinien to his reflections, which were far from gay, although his resolution was taken, and there was a good side to the case.

"I shall never become accustomed to the way things go on here," said he to himself, as he went up the Rue Monceau. "It is just as well to end it at once for all. To-morrow Madame Montauron shall have her casket, Count Aparanda shall be paid, and I shall leave them to settle their intrigue as they see fit. I shall have done more than I am called upon to do for that most imprudent woman, and I shall be free to leave Paris without regret. I will add a postscript to my letter to tell my uncle that I shall very soon return home."

At the Rue Rembrandt the door-keeper pulled the door rope at the first ring. Viscount d'Amaulis entered undisturbed, and reached the rooms in which he had left Madame Montauron, and which he now hoped to find unoccupied.

It was four in the morning. Dawn was near, but it was still quite dark. The house, which Anita and her gay attendants had disturbed, had now become quiet again. All the tenants were at rest, and Savinien glided along the hall on tiptoe. He had the key of his rooms in his pocket; he now noiselessly opened the door, and was at first startled to see that the lamp was still lighted.

He had intentionally left it burning. Madame Montauron had been concealed in the bedroom, and might easily have escaped without a light. But lamps go out when they are not attended to, and here was his still aflame.

He almost immediately saw why this was so. At the moment when he drew back the tapestry curtain from before the door a woman, who had been seated near the window, rose and came towards him.

"You here, madame!" exclaimed Savinien, surprised and alarmed on finding that the imprudent woman, who ought long before to have returned to her husband's house, was still there. "I fear to guess why. The garden is watched? You could not escape?"

"I have not attempted to do so," said Madame Montauron; "I was waiting for you. Be calm; I am sure that the road is free."

"You forget that it is almost morning."

"What does that matter? Brigitte is on the watch, and if there were any danger she would have come to tell me of it."

"You were waiting for me, you say? But didn't you hear that party of madcaps say that they wished me to go with them to supper, and play a game of cards, which might have kept me away all the morning? It was a miracle that I got away so soon."

"I heard everything. I knew that you would return as soon as you could make your escape, and I waited, because I knew that you would see him."

"Who? Count Aparanda? Hecame, that's certain," said Savinien, bitterly.

He had not yet forgotten what his encounter with this repulsive personage had cost him. The lady hesitated a moment before asking a question which had already offended Viscount d'Amaulis when addressed to him prior to George Fougeray's ring at the door-bell; however, she said at last: "Did you ask—?"

"His address!" interrupted Savinien; "another person asked it, and that person was Monsieur Montauron's partner."

"Monsieur Bouret! What! at that girl's house?"

"There's nothing in that to surprise one. He knows them all. He has the style and language of a man who goes to see such women. He spoke very indiscreetly before that gentleman about the casket which I have to return to you."

"But you did not tell him that you intended to take it back to-morrow?" asked Madame Montauron, eagerly.

"No, madame, I was very careful not to do so, for indiscretion is one of his smallest faults. Monsieur Bouret would no doubt have told the director of the Provincial Bank of my intentions, and this, perhaps, is all that would be wanting to confirm your husband in his suspicions. However, it is none the less true that, thanks to this gentleman's gabble, Count Aparanda now knows that I have deposited a casket at the banking house in the Avenue de l'Opéra, and that I did so at the very time when he placed an enormous chest there himself. I mention this fact to you; you can perhaps infer from it something that I am not able to detect, since I do not know the nature of your relations with this foreigner," added Savinien, somewhat rudely.

"I was about to tell you the story of my life when your friends came to take you away," said Madame Montauron. "I was about to explain to you why it was necessary for me to know where Count Aparanda lived. Before returning to the narrative of my sad past, I wish to say to you that Monsieur Aparanda has never seen the casket, and has no idea of its contents."

"So much the better, madame. I will not undertake to inform him as to what the contents may be, as I hope never to see him again; but I am able to tell you what interests you so much. Count Aparanda, when he left the hotel where I was staying, went to the Grand Hôtel. That, at all events, is the address which he gave to Monsieur Bouret in my presence."

"Do you think it is a false one," asked Madame Montauron.

"It is not I who think that, but rather Monsieur Bouret."

"On what does he found his doubts as to an assertion the accuracy of which he can easily ascertain?"

"On the fact that Count Aparanda made a false declaration a few days ago to a clerk, whose business it is to take down the names of all depositors. Count Aparanda had himself inscribed as living at the Rue du Helder hotel, which he had left some hours before he gave the address."

"That is strange, indeed," faltered the lady, hanging her head; "does he know that you were living in that hotel as well as he?"

"Monsieur Bouret gave him this information also. But my position as to Count Aparanda is very definite, and the line of conduct which I shall henceforth follow is laid down. I do not wish to be mixed up with that gentleman's affairs, and it will not suit me to enter into any relations with him. You asked me for a certain indication. I have given it. When you have received your casket my part will be finished. I have only to hope that no one will ever penetrate the secret of this troublesome adventure."

This was said in a firm, almost a harsh tone. Prior to the game which had had such disastrous results Viscount d'Amaulis would have shown more consideration for a fallen woman; but play had irritated his nerves and hardened his heart.

Madame Montauron felt the reproof and raised her head. "I will tell you my secret," said she, in a voice full of emotion.

"I do not ask to know it," replied Savinien.

"You must know it, so that you may be able to judge of my conduct. Listen, sir, and when you have heard my story, if you think me still unworthy of pity, I shall no longer ask your help. I shall resign myself to my fate, and to whatever God pleases. Your uncle, perhaps, told you that my father, the Marquis de Louvigné, was the companion of his childhood and his most intimate friend?"

"No, madame. My uncle never mentioned your name to me."

"But he expressly urged upon you to see me as soon as you came to Paris. When you return to Brittany I assure you that he will question you at length as to the life I lead; he will ask you if I am happy, for he never withdrew his friendship from me, although he knows my entire life up to the date of my marriage."

"It was he who arranged your marriage, was it not?"

"Yes; and I have never ceased to bless him for the twelve years of peace which I owe to him. My husband has done everything to make me happy. It did not depend upon him to remove from my heart my remorse for having deceived him, the best of men—him to whom I owed everything."

Savinien had some trouble in concealing an ironical grimace. This avowal, enveloped in sentimental phraseology, shocked him to such a degree that he mentally asked himself whether his uncle's favourite was not a monster of hypocrisy.

"Yes, I deceived him," resumed Madame Moutaaron, "and—shall I say it? Monsieur de Trémorin helped me to deceive him."

This time, Savinien shrugged his shoulders, and no longer attempted to hide the astonishment which this unexpected statement caused him to feel. He soon realised, however, that the lady's words did not have the meaning which he had at first attributed to them.

"Monsieur de Trémorin married me to him," she continued, "and he knew that I had previously committed a fault."

"This is more credible," thought Yvonne's cousin. "It is bad enough that my uncle should have done that, and the husband has certainly no reason to congratulate himself on his friendship; but it is less astounding than if he had been the lover of the wife himself."

"A fault which I have cruelly expiated," resumed Madame Moutaaron, "and still expiate. My mother died at my birth; I was but fourteen years old when I lost my father. There remained only one relative to me, a first cousin, who was a widow and very old. She promised Monsieur de Trémorin to take charge of me when my education was completed. I was educated at a boarding-school, and I left it when I was eighteen to live at my cousin's house. Madame de Morvieux—such was her name—asked but one thing: to marry me off as soon as possible. She was almost poor, her husband having spent her money; but she was received in the best society, where she hoped to find a good match for the daughter of the Marquis de Louvigné, although my father had left me scarcely enough to live on. She took me into this society; but, to my cost, she also saw a great deal of the cosmopolitan society which forms a kind of foreign colony in the midst of Paris, and is recruited in all directions. Monsieur de Morvieux had travelled a great deal in the north of Europe, and his widow had kept up her intercourse with several Swedish and Russian families."

Savinien raised his head. He was beginning to see how this story would end

"You have guessed, have you not?" said Madame Montauron, in a husky voice. "A man remarked me; he was young, handsome, rich; he paid me great attention, he assumed the attitude of a suitor for my hand, and my cousin, although she knew very little about him, made no attempt to put me on my guard against the love which he inspired in my heart, and when I fell a prey to his wiles, when the consequences of my weakness were irreparable, I learned that he was married."

"Married!" exclaimed Savinien. "Count Aparanda married! It is of him you speak, is it not? Ah! I felt that the man could not be other than a scoundrel!"

"Your uncle looked for him for a long time, with the intention of killing him," said Madame Montauron.

"That is an execution which I would willingly undertake myself," said Viscount d'Amaulis, between his teeth. "The coward fled, no doubt, after having dishonoured you?"

"He returned to Sweden."

"He really has a country, then? I should never have supposed so. I should not be surprised if he were a sham count."

"No, he inherited his title from his ancestors; and when I had the misfortune to meet him he had not yet stained his name by conduct unworthy of a gentleman."

"But he has dragged it in the mire since that time. That I have no difficulty in believing."

"I do not know what he may have done, for I have not seen him for twelve years. I only know that he squandered an enormous fortune, and that, after a frightful scandal, he was obliged to leave his own country. He lived the life of an adventurer for a long time, running all over Europe without settling anywhere, and without any pecuniary resources of an honourable kind."

"I know what his resources are: he lives by gambling," said Savinien, and as he muttered these words he well remembered the last game of baccarat which he had played.

"He went to all the seaside resorts, and at last to Monaco. It was from there that he wrote to me to tell me that he was coming to Paris."

"What! did you still keep up a correspondence with this man?"

"There was a tie between us which prevented a rupture with him."

"A tie! between the criminal and the victim?"

"I had become a mother," said Madame Montauron, in a low tone.

Savinien started, but remained silent. He understood all at last.

"Yes," resumed the poor woman, with an effort, "my misfortune was complete. In order to hide the consequences of my weakness, Madame de Morvieux took me to Italy. We passed a year at Pisa, where I had a daughter born to me."

"Did my uncle know this?" eagerly asked Yvonne's cousin.

"No, I told him of my fault alone."

"That is not so bad," said Savinien to himself.

He would have been grieved to admit that M. de Trémorin had contributed to deceive a worthy man so completely, and tried to find extenuating circumstances for his conduct in the matter.

"He was guided by the light-mindedness of a nobleman who thinks less of the honour of a mere citizen than of the reputation of a nobly born young lady," muttered Savinien. "I shall never be guided by such principles as those."



"Do not condemn him," said Madame Montauron, as she caught his words. There were tears in her eyes. "I am the daughter of his dearest friend, and he knew that I had yielded to temptations against which no one had put me on my guard, for I had no mother. He held out his hand to me from above the abyss into which I had fallen. When he effected my marriage, he well knew that I should pass the remainder of my life in endeavouring to expiate the past."

"But that past rises up against you, since your lover has reappeared, and did you not say just now that you had never ceased to receive his letters?"

"Could I forbid him to write to me about our child?" asked Madame Montauron.

"What! did he trouble himself about her after having betrayed and abandoned you?" exclaimed Savinien incredulously.

"Madame de Morvieux exacted that the child should remain in Italy. She confided her, under an assumed name, to some poor people, who were ignorant of the secret of her birth, and who, for a small sum, undertook to bring her up as their own daughter. My cousin, who held my fate in her own hands, wished me to promise never to see the child again. She wished to save the honour of the name of Louvigné. It mattered little to her that my heart should be broken. Your uncle would have been more humane, and I have often regretted not having told him the whole truth."

"Had he known it, I certainly doubt whether he would have lent himself to the arrangement proposed by your cousin to cover an irreparable fault."

"It would have been a thousand times better had I remained unmarried," rejoined Madame Montauron. "But I was not yet twenty years old. I was without strength, without help, crushed under the weight of my shame. I consented to everything except to the sacrifice exacted of me. I would not consent to give up my daughter for ever, and I wrote to her father to let him know her whereabouts, and to beg him to watch over her, and to inform me of all that concerned her. I hoped that a day would come, perchance, when I might be able to bring her to France secretly, without disturbing the peace of mind of the man whose name I bore."

"Did Count Aparanda consent to what you asked?" asked Viscount d'Amaulis.

"For two years there was no reply, and I had been eighteen months a married woman when he wrote to me that his wife was dead, that nothing further obliged him to remain in Sweden, and that he was about to leave for Italy. He protested that he was repentant, and that he would do nothing to trouble me."

"He had learned, then, that Monsieur Montauron had married you?" said Savinien.

"Yes; and although he approved of my course, he expressed his regret at being unable to repair the evil he had done by marrying me. He promised to at least watch over our child, and for ten years past he has vaguely written to me every month concerning her."

"She is still living!" exclaimed Savinien.

"She is alive and is in Paris. I was on my way to see and embrace her when I was obliged to take refuge in your room on flying from my husband."

"What! did that man tell you that she was with him? It was an infamous falsehood!" said the viscount.

"No," replied the suffering woman. "I misunderstood his letter. This is what had happened:—My daughter had remained in Pisa. It had been agreed between her father and myself that he should bring her back to France when she was of an age to marry. However, quite recently, the good people who had brought her up died within a few days of one another. The count was at Monaco. He hastened to Pisa, and wrote to me to ask me if he should bring Jeanne to Paris, and place her in a boarding-school, where, at least, I could see her. Need I tell you my answer? I had scarcely existed for twelve years, and I was now about to behold the child who had been torn from my arms in her infancy."

"But you have not seen her. What has he done with her?" asked M. d'Amaulis.

"He arrived here with her about thirteen days ago, and immediately wrote to me that he had confided Jeanne to a relative of his, a Swedish lady, who lives in the country, in the environs of Paris. He thought this a better and less dangerous arrangement than keeping her with him at a hotel. He begged me at the same time to see him as soon as possible, because he would be forced to leave sooner than he had supposed. He had, he told me, lost heavy sums at play."

"He has made up for that since," muttered Savinien.

"He added that the time had come for making permanent arrangements for the future welfare of our child, and that he relied upon me to invest, in Jeanne's name, a sum of money which would keep her entirely secure against want. He reminded me that I might die, and that he himself was completely ruined."

"He does not look so."

"This letter was a terrible blow to me. I am rich, but I cannot dispose of a fortune which belongs to my husband. I possessed nothing but my diamonds that I could turn into money."

"Then you were taking them to this man that day?" said Savinien.

"Yes; in order that he might sell them and settle the money on my daughter."

"Did he know that you were bringing them to him?" asked the viscount.

"No," was the reply. "I wrote to him merely saying that I was trying to procure money; that I would go to see him as soon as I could succeed in doing so; and that I begged of him to so arrange matters as to enable me to embrace my daughter on the day of my going to see him."

"What did he reply?"

"I received a note from him containing these words only: 'Come; you shall see her; but don't delay more than three days. I am forced to renounce the idea of living in Paris. If I am constrained to leave without seeing you, I will let you know where Jeanne is.'"

"He did not keep his word, I presume? It is true, however, that he has not yet left the city," said Savinien, thoughtfully.

"After receiving this letter, I endured terrible mental anguish for forty-eight hours. My husband did not leave me one moment to myself, and I had no possibility of getting away. When, on the morning of the third day, I was able to escape——"

"I know the rest, madame," interrupted Savinien. "But I understand less than ever the course pursued by Count Aparanda."

"I do not even try to understand it. It is sufficient for me that he has not left Paris yet," said the banker's wife.

"You still wish to see him, then, after all this?"

"I wish to see my daughter."

"But you will be obliged to entreat this man to allow you to see her, for you are completely at his mercy. You will again be obliged to risk your reputation and your peace by running after him at the hotels where he may put up, until he sees fit to disappear with the money he has won."

"You might spare me this danger and these humiliations," said Madame Montauron, in a faltering voice.

"I?" exclaimed the viscount, in utter astonishment.

"Yes; you are acquainted with him now, and you know where he lives."

At this proposition, which Savinien would have foreseen had he been less anxious, he started with surprise and indignation.

"What!" cried he; "you ask me to interview this man, when you have just told me what he has done, and that he has led the life of an adventurer for twelve years? Don't expect that of me, madame. I have seen only too much of him already, and I don't intend ever to see him again."

"Not even to save me from despair, and to restore my daughter to me?" entreated Madame Montauron.

"Your daughter? But I cannot restore her to you. Do I know where she is?" said the viscount.

"He will tell you if you ask him."

"What right have I to ask him? I am neither your relation nor——"

"You are the nephew of the man who was my friend and my defender, and who if he were here would not refuse to aid me again. I will tell him all, and make him the judge as to the situation in which I find myself. Do you think that he would advise me to abandon an unfortunate girl who is not guilty, and who has no means except what I might provide?"

"You forget that she only knows her father, and that he has taken care of her since her birth," replied Savinien, in an ironical tone.

"You cannot think that I ought to leave her with him?"

"No, certainly not, for she could not be in worse hands; but it does not appear to me that he intends to keep her, since he began by getting rid of her on arriving in Paris, by handing her over to one of his own countrywomen, I think you said?"

"Yes, to a Swedish lady, whose name he did not tell me, and if he goes away without telling me where my daughter is, I——"

"I don't fancy that he is thinking of going away. He has become a member of a club, and was buying some furniture the other day at the auction-rooms in the Rue Drouot."

"But he is still at a hotel, and may leave Paris at any moment!"

"True. Now that he has won a great deal of money, he will perhaps think it best to protect his belongings and his person by leaving for foreign parts. And you must permit me to remark, madame, that if Count Aparanda really wished to make proper provision for his daughter, he is fully able to do so. He has won a hundred and fifty thousand francs at cards within a few day's time. If his outrageous good luck continues, as I have no doubt that it will, he will soon have two hundred thousand. That, I believe, is what your diamonds are worth."

"Do you think that the idea would occur to him of employing his winnings to shield Jeanne from want? You do not know him."

"I do know him, madame, and now that I am satisfied as to what he is, I am greatly surprised that you should have thought of handing him a casket, the contents of which constitute a fortune."

"I thought only of my daughter, and had but one resource. However, Providence has permitted that this fortune should fall into your hands."

"It will not remain in them long," said Savinien, abruptly. "To-morrow you shall have the casket. I will go to take it back at the risk of being caught by your husband, or betrayed by the indiscretion of his partner. I promised you to do this, and I will do it; but I can do nothing more. I wish to return to Brittany to-morrow, or this evening, if I can. I should go now, if I had not promised to restore this casket to you."

"May I know the reason of this sudden resolution? Yesterday you were thinking of making a long stay in Paris, and you moved into these rooms."

"Yesterday I had money enough to live on here, money made against my will, and which I really did not care to take with me to Plouër. My uncle would have thought better of me for leaving it here, as it was money acquired in an objectionable way. But I shall not now be troubled to spend it. I have just lost it all at baccarat, and owe it to Count Aparanda. I shall pay it over to him this evening, and when this debt is met, nothing more will detain me in Paris."

"This evening, you say? Do you expect to see Count Aparanda this evening?"

"I hope not. He wished to spare me the disagreeable necessity of meeting him. I proposed to take the money to him at the Grand Hôtel, where he is supposed to be staying; but he very eagerly suggested another course, which consists in depositing the amount of my debt in the cash box at the Plungers' Club. I shall not be there when he goes to claim it."

"But it depends upon you to be there or not!"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, I ask it of you as a favour; I ask it of you in the name of your uncle, who, if he could hear me, would add his entreaties to mine, tell everything to this man who holds my daughter's life and mine in his hands. Tell him everything, relate to him what took place on that fatal day when I fled to your room to avoid being found by my husband. When he knows all, he will not be surprised by your intervention in this painful affair, and will not refuse to tell you where my daughter is."

"How do you know that, madame?" said Savinien, impatiently. "This man may have plans that do not tally with your wishes, and even if he consents to answer me, what part should I then play? Do you wish me to go and take a girl, whom I do not know, from a Swedish woman in whose existence I do not believe?"

"No. I will ask no more of you. Brigitte, who knows all—for she has never left me from my childhood—will do the rest. She will come here to-morrow to receive the casket, and she will take charge of Jeanne. You will never hear of me again, but I shall bless you for ever."

Savinien struggled in vain against the emotion which he felt, he was unable to resist the woman's entreaties, the mother's tears. "Will it satisfy you," said he at last, "if I question this man, and force him to reply, for I warn you that I shall force him to do so if he presumes to refuse?"

"Why should he refuse? You must tell him that I am ready to make any sacrifice."

"I shall tell him no such thing, as I believe him to be fully capable of taking every advantage of your situation; but I will tell him that I have promised to enable you to recover your daughter, and that this is a matter to be settled between him and me."

"You do not mean to fight a duel with him, to risk your life against his? No! no! that must not be!" cried Madame Montauron.

"The stakes are far from equal," replied Savinien, "but we shall not go so far as that. I do not know whether Count Aparanda is brave or not—I admit that he may be so—but I am sure that he has every motive for avoiding an exposure."

"He will yield, and to-morrow evening you will——"

"To-morrow evening, madame," interrupted Savinien, "I will visit you in compliance with Monsieur Montauron's kind invitation, and I shall by that time have seen Count Aparanda. He comes almost every day to the club, at five o'clock, and will not fail to do so to-morrow, as he has money to receive."

"Then you will be able to tell me everything at my house?"

"All that I may have learned. I promise you that, madame, as well as to restore you your diamonds; and now suffer me to remind you of the lateness of the hour," added Savinien, who wished to escape being thanked.

The sky was already brightening, and a narrow ray of light stole in between the curtains. Madame Montauron did not add a word. She felt that it was no time to utter many thanks. She extended her hand to Viscount d'Amaulis, who placed a respectful kiss upon it before opening the glass door leading to the garden. It was not yet quite dawn; the park was still and dark. Everything showed that Madame Montauron could return home without danger.

Without risking an increase of the peril to which she had exposed herself, Savinien could not escort her further than the gate between the grounds, but he followed her with his eyes as far as he could see her in the dimness of the dawn, and had the satisfaction of seeing her pass on to the shadow cast by the high walls of her own house.

Reassured as to her return home he re-entered the room which had witnessed such novel adventures, and threw himself grumbling into the arm-chair where he had been seated when Madame Montauron's coming had so startled him.

The letter to his uncle was still on the table, and his hand had stopped in the middle of a paragraph in which he asked M. de Trémorin how Madame Montauron's marriage had come about.

"Bless me!" he muttered, as he read it over, "I can now answer the question which I ask of him, and I have a great mind to scratch it out. But no! I will simply add that I cannot accustom myself to life in Paris, and that I am making ready to return to Plouër. After all, however, I should act more wisely if I waited till to-morrow before speaking of returning, for I shall not be master of my own actions as long as I am held fast in the intrigue of this woman my dear uncle protected, and it will be a whole day's work to get rid of it entirely."

## VIII.

WHEN Savinien d'Amaulis woke up after the troubled night which had brought his affairs back to the starting-point—precisely as they were on his arrival in Paris—he immediately made up his accounts, and ascertained that when he had paid all that he owed, enough cash would not remain to enable him to take his ticket for Plouër.

Baccarat, his purchases of furniture, and his current expenses during this first week, had exhausted the sum which the lucky operation on 'Change had sent as a windfall. Even the thousand francs received on his letter of credit had been spent. Thus it was absolutely necessary to make some new arrangement, for it was not certain that Madame Montauron's affairs would be brought to a satisfactory conclusion that day.

Savinien had promised to give her back her diamonds and to bring her back her daughter. He might, perhaps, hope that the withdrawal of the casket would be effected without difficulty; but he doubted the immediate success of the negotiation with Count Aparanda. This equivocal individual seemed to him quite capable of raising difficulties. Savinien was aware that to deal with all the complications that might arise he would perhaps have to delay his departure, and, in any case, he thought it best to take such measures as would enable him to remain some days longer in Paris.

The easiest way would assuredly be to apply for some more money at the banking-house where his uncle had opened an account for him, and this was the first thought that occurred to his mind. But, on reflection, he clearly saw that the thing was not as easy as it seemed, and that, for the moment, it was indeed almost impracticable.

He remembered that he could not receive any money unless he took the trouble of going through M. Bouret's office—as the under-manager looked into letters of credit—and, on the other hand, he had not forgotten that he must go before noon to take out the casket. It would be dangerous to try and kill—as the phrase goes—two birds with one stone. An interview with the under-manager either before or after the visit to the vaults would be undesirable for many reasons. After the visit, Bouret would not fail to notice the casket that M. d'Amaulis carried and he would have indulged in some of his frivolous jokes as to this mysterious coffer, for Savinien, when once he had the precious casket in his hands, could not put it into a cab like a box of ties or handkerchiefs, but would have for safety's sake to carry it under his arm until he could place it in a drawer of his desk while waiting for the arrival of Brigitte.

Matters would be still worse if he saw Bouret before going to the vault. The financier was the man to ply the viscount with questions, to conjecture that his true errand was to withdraw his deposit, and to log his footsteps until he had left the building.

Already on leaving the card-party at Anita's, M. Montauron's partner had alluded to the possibility of a speedy visit from Savinien, if the latter were obliged by a heavy loss at play to open the casket and take out some money for the purpose of paying his debts.

From all this, Baron de Trémorin's nephew concluded that it would be necessary to present himself twice at the Provincial Bank; the first time to take back the casket, the second to receive his money. It would be better, therefore, to leave one or two days' interval between the two visits; and

it was undeniably the better course to begin by taking out the casket, especially as Madame Montauron absolutely needed the diamonds for the evening reception. From all this it resulted that, for the time being, Savinien would remain without a copper.

Under other circumstances he would not have troubled himself about this temporary embarrassment, but he might have a deal of trouble as regarded the Swede, and he could not carry on war without ammunition.

He now remembered that on leaving Anita's house George Fougeray had spoken of a money-lender who would willingly lend a thousand louis, which was much more than Savinien cared to borrow, and in his innocence he said to himself that he might find at this financial interloper's the very small sum which he personally required for a little time. He had only to ask George to effect this for him, and George would be quite willing to do so, as he had proposed to his friend to raise on joint and equal terms for both a large loan at heavy interest.

Savinien mentally went through this reasoning while dressing at ten in the morning, and he was already on the point of starting out, as he had given but little time to sleep. He calculated that twelve o'clock would be a favourable moment for presenting himself at the Provincial Bank. He had gone there at an earlier hour on his first visit, and had found M. Bouret there; but this financier, like all business men in Paris, probably breakfasted late, and remained away for that reason in the middle of the day. This would, at least, account for Savinien having met him a few days before at M. Montauron's house at noon. The head director, for his part, never went to the office in the Avenue de l'Opéra until after Bourse hours.

Now, Savinien thought it absolutely necessary to go to the vaults in the absence of both of these parties. Before doing so he had time to call upon George, who lived in the Rue d'Antin, and was probably still in bed. It was all very well for a country gentleman to rise early after going to bed late, but Parisians after a night at baccarat usually sleep the best part of the morning, and George, although born at Rennes in Brittany, was now-a-days a thorough Parisian. Knowing this, the viscount resolved not to lose the chance, and rang for his make-shift valet to fetch a cab. He was glad to have an opportunity of seeing the doorkeeper, as the latter was in the pay of the landlord, for he wished to assure himself that no one had complained of having been disturbed by the revellers of the night before, or by Madame Montauron's arrival and retreat. The doorkeeper did not appear to have noticed these intrusions, and Savinien was satisfied from his demeanour that he knew nothing whatever about the visit of the banker's wife.

A quarter of an hour later, Yvonne's cousin entered George Fougeray's rooms, the door being opened by that individual himself. "I thought I should have found you in bed," said Savinien, astonished to find his friend fully dressed, with his hat on his head.

"Five minutes later and you would not have found me at all," answered George. "My circumstances do not admit of my playing the idler at present. I have no château or lands in the provinces, and I must remain in Paris and fight the battle of life. I am going to try to raise some money."

"Take me with you."

"Oho! Then you have made up your mind not to creep pitifully back into your hole? Night brings good advice, it would appear. So much the better! I felt very sorry to see you take your ill luck so very much to

heart. Now that you are better disposed our situation will change, I'll answer for that!"

"Oh, don't rejoice too much. I don't deserve your compliments, for I intend to leave very soon. I am detained here for a few days longer, but when I have paid this Swede I shan't possess a farthing, and living here is expensive."

"As if I didn't know it! I don't find it less than ten louis a day; three hundred louis a month, and that without any extravagance. But I have some debts, and when I think that this rascally Aparanda sweeps away sixty thousand francs, the desire to strangle him, instead of paying him, takes hold of me. Unfortunately, this isn't customary. I must return to Pinchard's clutches."

"Who may Pinchard be?"

"A charming fellow, who takes a pleasure in obliging his friends—at twenty per cent."

"The money-lender of whom you spoke this morning?"

"Money-lender? Well, I should say so! Arab, Jew, skin-flint, anything you please! But don't take it into your head to call him so to his face. You would spoil our borrowing. This close-fisted chap tries to play the gentleman. A type, my dear boy, for a play. You will see him! It will amuse you."

"The more from the fact that he won't ruin me, even at a big interest. I want but little from him."

"The deuce! But let me tell you that Pinchard does not go into small transactions; he says that it would lessen him in his own esteem."

"I cannot take a heavy debt upon myself for the purpose of pleasing him, however."

"How much do you want?"

"A thousand francs, and if I must I can do with less."

"A thousand francs! Pinchard would laugh in your face. What good would a thousand francs do you! You could not get along for a week."

"It will be enough for me."

"Do you intend to live on the fare that they prepare at Duval's eating-houses? If such are your ideas, my friend, you may as well pawn your watch at once; that would be the shortest way. But, now I think of it, why don't you go to Bouret for fifty louis, if that is all you want? You haven't used up your letter of credit, that I know of, and you need only take the trouble of going to the Avenue de l'Opéra when you leave here."

"I don't wish to go to Monsieur Bouret," answered Savinien.

"Why not?" asked George. "Are you afraid to tell him that you lost heavily at cards last night? He must think that you did, I imagine, as you were already being victimised when he took his departure. Just think that he should have managed to win—the wretch!"

"No, it is not on that account, but I have my reasons for not wishing to see him to-day, and I need some money at once. In a few days' time I will draw out the rest of my letter of credit, and pay back your money-lender. There are six thousand francs at the bank of mine, and I have only received a thousand. I shan't be at all put out to pay him."

"If I can understand you, I wish the devil may fly away with me! What! pay a big interest when you need not do it? That's a strange way of doing things, I must say. I tell you that you can't do as you propose. Pinchard wouldn't lend less than ten thousand, and that only for a few days."



"And I won't borrow what I can't pay."

"Nor I, either. I have been in debt often, but have always paid at last. The proof of this is that I have credit at Pinchard's; and he knows very well whom he lends to. I can have a thousand louis from him on my signature, but, unfortunately, a thousand louis would do me no good just now. I shall be obliged to strain a point, and I foresee that it will be hard work. Pinchard is as particular as he can be, and as stubborn as a mule. He has his customers all classed and ticketed. Each one is worth so much and no more, and when once he has settled in his mind how much, he won't budge an inch."

"The deuce! you run the risk, then, of being in a very bad fix?"

"I admit that I am afraid it will be so, and this would be extremely annoying, for if I made that scamp of a Swede wait for his money, everybody in the club would know that I am behindhand, and I should be 'posted.' That is the way in Paris, my dear boy! You may put off your tradespeople, and even cause their failure; that is considered quite the thing among certain people. But a man who doesn't pay his gambling debts within twenty-four hours is thought nothing of. At the most he may be allowed forty-eight hours; they do that at some clubs."

"Tell me at once how much you need to square everything."

"Thirty thousand francs; and as I must have something to go on with till I find some new chance, it is, in point of fact, forty thousand that I must borrow."

"Exactly twice as much as your usual money-lender is in the habit of letting you have. But there must be other people in Paris of the same description."

"Hundreds, but with this man everything is very prompt. He gives you good bank-notes, and pays them down. It is easy to see why. His usual customers are gamblers who can't wait. Other lenders keep you waiting, and sometimes end by offering you aluminium watches and stuffed crocodiles in payment. There's nobody better than Pinchard, I tell you. Pinchard for ever!"

"Very well, but if he refuses," said Savinien, who had already forgotten his own difficulties in his interest in those of his friend.

"Well, if he refuses, I can throw myself into the Seine or go to Australia," rejoined Fougeray, with a grimace.

"Oh, before coming to that point——"

"I shall try other remedies less violent, of course. But I shall begin at the beginning, that is to say, with Pinchard, and I am losing precious time in talk. My man receives from nine till twelve, and I don't want to miss him."

"Let us go, then, my dear fellow. I should reproach myself with being the cause of your failure if I detained you here."

"You will come with me, then?"

"If you think it would be best."

"Certainly, you can be very useful to me; but remember, if you talk to Pinchard about borrowing fifty louis you will upset everything."

"Why? Your Pinchard prefers to lend a great deal, I see that, but if he can lend a great deal he can lend a little."

"Of course he can, but he won't, and he would have a very poor idea of your resources."

"I should really like to know what he could know about my resources, when he does not even know of my existence."

"That is where you are mistaken. Every man who is a member of a decent club is immediately entered upon Pinchard's register, for he informs himself as to his circumstances. I am sure that he knows already all about yours, and had no trouble about getting his information."

"He must be wise if he knows as much about my circumstances as your broker, Galipot."

"You may laugh, my dear fellow, but I'll bet that Pinchard has more confidence in you than Galipot had when he went into operations on your account to the tune of six hundred thousand francs. It is well known everywhere now that you are a landowner and your uncle a millionaire."

"Still the same foolish story! The business people in Paris must be idiots."

"Idiots or not, you may be sure that they think a great deal of your signature, and that you will make the greatest mistake in the world if you compromise your credit and mine by proclaiming that you stand in need of a trifling sum. I tell you that if you make up your mind to borrow a respectable amount, say ten thousand, you would be giving me a great lift without knowing it. Your negotiation would make mine much easier."

"How is that?"

"I should have preferred not to explain it to you, as you may think that I speak in my own interest, but as you wish me to be very explicit, I assure you that if we apply together to Pinchard for one loan he will not hesitate a moment."

"What do you mean by 'one loan'?"

"I mean a loan guaranteed by notes bearing our collective signatures, and which we will share between us."

"Fifty thousand francs, then, since you need forty thousand? It would be really absurd, and whatever desire I may have to oblige you I cannot take upon myself a debt which I shall never be able to pay."

"Oh, I can understand your looking at the matter twice, or even refusing to have anything to do with it at all, as you need but a few louis, for the interest is enormous; forty thousand francs for three months would cost nearly three thousand francs. It is hard to make such terms unless one is forced to do so, I admit that, and I say no more. Still, there would be a way of reconciling everything——"

"What way?" demanded Savinien, eagerly.

"No matter! no matter! I should seem to be urging you to compromise yourself to oblige me."

"Tell me what it is. I know that you are incapable of bringing me into trouble," said the viscount.

"Well, then, it would be sufficient if you would endorse the notes which I shall give to Pinchard. I will undertake to meet them when due, and you need not trouble your head about them. With your name Pinchard will make no difficulty about lending me forty thousand, on which, of course, I will hand you a hundred, two hundred, or three hundred louis, which you can return me from time to time at your convenience. I need not add that the interest will be entirely paid by me."

"No, no! I will pay my own proportion."

"That will be very little. We shall not discuss that. I only beg of you to reflect beforehand, as I have no wish to urge you against your will. I ought also to explain to you upon what I rely to prevent our notes from being protested, for you may imagine that my hopes are founded upon

some speculation on 'Change like that with which I associated you the other day. It isn't so, my dear fellow, such windfalls are too rare, and I have certainties elsewhere, a pile of 'Ottoman' stock bought low, which in three months will be worth ten times as much as I paid for it."

"How can you be sure that it will go up?"

"I have private information, my dear fellow. There is a syndicate being formed of twelve great financial companies to represent the interests of the bearers of the Turkish debt, and I know the delegate whom they will employ at Constantinople. In August, at the latest, the stock will go up. Take notice that, if by any almost impossible chance, it does not do so, I should only have to renew at three months. Pinchard does not refuse to renew once, though he won't do so twice; still, at the worst, I would sell my 'Ottomans,' which, even at their present rate, are worth more than fifty thousand francs. This would be bad, as in a very near future they would represent a fortune, but I would rather be utterly ruined than not honour my signature, and, above all, yours. If you doubt that, my dear Savinien, don't go any further, but let me go alone to tame the dragon of the Rue Sainte-Anne, for it is there that this terrible Pinchard lives."

"Listen," said Savinien, after a short silence, "I don't understand anything about all the speculations which you speak of; give me your word that you are sure, absolutely sure, of being able to pay when the notes fall due."

George Fougeray was sufficiently master of himself to control his delight at having this chance. "If you ask me to say I am sure, it is because you doubt me; my most solemn assurances would not change the situation," he replied. "It is useless, therefore, that I should take an oath. Keep your signature, my dear boy, and don't think any more about my difficulties, which I will arrange with Pinchard as well as I can."

"You turn testy very unnecessarily," replied Savinien, quickly. "When I ask you to give me your word it is a mere form. It is sufficient for you to say to me: 'Yes, I am sure of being able to repay in three months' time the sum which I borrow on your security.'"

"I have already said it, and I repeat it."

"Very good! That is all I require. If I thought you capable of deceiving me, I should not be your friend," said the viscount.

"That is as it should be, and I understand that you should speak so. I confess that you hurt my feelings just now. I said to myself: 'I don't recognise Savinien.' But now I find you to be the same as before. Let us say no more, but go at once to Pinchard's."

"Let us go to him," answered Viscount d'Amaulis, who always began by resisting allurements, and invariably ended by making some mistake or other.

Fougeray did not allow him time to change his mind; but urged him on with friendly chatter.

"I am not so well lodged as you are," said he, as they went down stairs. "Now-a-days an *entresol* isn't stylish at all. It was all very well at the time when the heroes of Paul de Kock's novels kept opera-dancers on six thousand francs a year. But now a man who wishes to be fashionable lives on the first floor. I shall go up when my 'Ottomans' go up. Speaking of rooms, have you reflected that you will owe Monsieur Montauron six months' rent even if you start for Brittany to-morrow?"

"That's true. I had not thought of it, however. But it is only fifteen

hundred francs; and, besides, I shall sell that famous set of furniture which you made me buy."

"There's no need of that. I like it, and if I take a permanent place this summer, I will buy it of you for what you gave for it. Here is your cab! Send it away, my dear fellow; we are only two steps from the Rue Sainte-Anne. Pinchard likes to have people come to him on foot; he does not care to let his business be known. I have known him refuse ten thousand francs to a young man of my acquaintance who came to borrow them in a mail-coach, just before driving to the races. All the shopkeepers in the neighbourhood came out on to their doorsteps to see the young fool drive up."

Savinien smiled at the money-lender's susceptibility, and sent away his cab. The walk was enlivened by the jokes of George, who had recovered his good humour, and the two friends soon reached the door of a house of plain appearance, an old house situated in that part of the Rue Sainte-Anne which has not yet been levelled or widened. Under the arched entrance Savinien was greatly surprised to meet the Marquis Adh  mar de Laffemas, who burst out laughing at sight of him, and said abruptly: "I have caught you in the very act, cousin! You have come to see that rascal of a Pinchard! It seems to me that all your fine plans as to a sagacious line of conduct have come to nothing, as you have already got to the money-lender."

"I beg your pardon!" stammered Viscount d'Amaulis. "I did not exactly come to—"

"Oh," interrupted the marquis, "don't think that I am blaming you for it! It is a bad thing to have recourse to this bird of prey, but it is the best thing to do when one is dead broke. Friends never have any money to lend when people want it, and they tell your troubles to every one they meet. You see that I practise what I preach. I have made one of those blunders—it was last night—which are disastrous in a gentleman's life, and I had to get up before dawn to come here and pull the providential Pinchard's bell rope. I hope that you will find him as easy to deal with as I have, and now, good-day. Good-by, cousin, till Sunday! I have bet ten louis for you on a horse which is now at twenty to one, but will be at 'evens' on the day of the Grand Prize of Paris."

With this the marquis disappeared, without honouring Fougeray, whom Savinien was about to introduce, with a single glance.

"Ah! so that is your cousin, that great lanky fellow Laffemas," said George, who had stood by, stiff as a pole, while this conversation had been going on, and had been very careful not to touch his hat.

"A cousin after a fashion. His great-great-grandmother was an Amaulis," answered Savinien, who was invariably surprised by the ways of Parisians. In the country, in such a case, bows were always exchanged, but these gentlemen had contented themselves with looking askance at one another. "Do you know him?" he resumed.

"Everybody knows him," replied George, drily; "he is about everywhere, even on 'Change.'"

"And at the money-lenders, it appears," said Savinien thoughtfully. "It is very strange! I thought that he was very rich. He has horses, turn-outs, and everything else. He lives in his mother's superb house in the Rue de Varennes."

"In Paris, my dear boy, no one is rich."

"Well, it seems everybody wants money."

"The proof of that is that we have come to Pinchard's. Let us go up, my dear friend. Time is passing by, and I don't wish to miss our man."

The steps were of stone with an iron balustrade, and dated from the eighteenth century. The money-lender lived in a house which had been built for some state-counsellor. On the landing of the first floor, the two friends met a young woman of fair complexion, elegantly dressed, who quickly lowered her veil on seeing them, and stole away, keeping close to the wall.

"That's strange!" muttered Savinien, "it seems to me that I have seen that face somewhere."

"I should say so, indeed!" replied George, in a low tone. "She was at the confectioner's shop, near the Bourse, when I called there for you. She is the little Countess de Gravigny, an intrepid speculator who operates through the agency of a good-looking clerk at Galipot's office. It seems that settling-day has been bad for her, as she is just coming out of the den in which Pinchard polishes off his customers."

"He lends to women as well as men, then?"

"Certainly, if they are desirable customers. It is said he has an understanding with the fashionable men-dressmakers to have the reliable women who have large outstanding bills sent to him to borrow."

Savinien thought to himself: "If Madame Montauron knew this, she would perhaps come to this fellow instead of selling her diamonds. This Countess de Gravigny could tell her all about it, as she is acquainted with her. They were talking together at the Ladies' Exchange."

The name of Pinchard was not displayed on any brass plate on the door of the office. This money-lender wished to be taken for a private citizen, and left signs and inscriptions to shopkeepers. Fougeray rang. A valet dressed in black opened the door and ushered him inside without asking him what he wished. This servant remembered faces, and recognised his master's customers, after once seeing them.

Viscount d'Amaulis admired the decorations of the reception-room, which was hung with Cordova leather, ornamented with modern pictures and decked with various choice bits of furniture. Nothing suggested usury. One would have thought it the sitting room of some rich connoisseur.

"What do you say to this room?" asked George Fougeray. "This doesn't remind one of the money-lenders of Molière's plays."

"Those of the present day live in better style, I admit it," said Savinien, "but I presume that they know how to cheat their customers quite as well."

"They do it in a more ceremonious way, my boy," rejoined George. "However, you will see for yourself. Pinchard is the politest and most accommodating man in the world."

The conversation did not continue, for the capitalist did not keep them waiting. The valet returned almost immediately to usher them in to his master's private room. They entered an office which would have proved suitable as a ministerial study. The ceiling was high, the carved-wood furniture rich, but all of subdued style, save an ebony book-case ornamented with brass. The person of M. Pinchard was not out of keeping with his surroundings. He was a tall young man of thirty or so, sturdily built, and dressed with extreme elegance; a little too fair, perhaps, but very good-looking. His features were regular and his face even pleasing. But there was a want of frankness in the expression of his eyes.

He was seated in front of a superb writing-table, on which he was engaged in arranging some papers, but he at once rose and came forward, smilingly, to greet his visitors.

"Good day, my dear Fougerey," said he. "I was expecting you."

"You must be a sorcerer, then," exclaimed George, "for I had no idea last night that I should come to see you this morning."

"I knew it after I saw Glébof. He was here at nine precisely."

"Then he told you how we were all fleeced at baccarat?"

"Yes. I know all about your card-party, just as well as though I had been there myself. I know so much about it that I can guess who this gentleman is," added Pinchard, with a bow to Savinien.

"You remind me that I ought to have begun by introducing my friend, Viscount d'Amaulis," said Fougerey.

"I was sure that I had guessed rightly," exclaimed Pinchard. "Glébof told me the names of the losers, and as I know all the others, it was enough for me to see this gentleman with you to know whom I should have to deal with. You are welcome, viscount, be good enough to take a seat; I am at your orders."

This opening annoyed Savinien greatly. It angered him to learn that the story of his losses at play had been noised about, and the sweet manners of the mealy-mouthed money-lender appeared very suspicious to him.

"And so, my dear sir," said George, "I need not tell you what we have come for?"

"Oh no, it would be useless. I knew that you had both been very unlucky, that this gentleman lost even more than you did, and that you have both of you big gaps to fill up."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied Savinien, in a tone of vexation, "my gaps are filled up, as I had the money to pay my losses."

"I don't doubt that, sir," answered Pinchard, eagerly. "When a man has a name like yours, he does not play, unless he is able to pay all losses at once, and with a fortune like yours, a man is always able to come up to the mark."

"What do you know about my fortune?"

"What I know about that of all my customers. It is my business to know these things."

"Yes, yes!" interrupted George, who was afraid that Savinien might make some impudent reply; "we know that you have registers, and that your list of young men of good family is always made out to date. You might, if you chose, take the place of a matrimonial agent, and fathers before giving their daughters to high-livers, might write to you to inquire about the debts of the sons-in-law who are proposed to them."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Pinchard, "that wouldn't be a bad precaution to take; but I lend to other people besides young men."

"Oh! I believe that."

"I lend to mammas; I lend to papas; and you know very well, my dear Fougerey, that my conditions are as moderate as possible. To hear you, Monsieur d'Amaulis might think me a usurer, although I haven't the face, nor am I of the age of one."

"A usurer! For shame! You oblige your friends, that's all. But if you charge more than the legal interest, the Bank of France does the same, as it has, at times, raised rates of discount to nine and ten per cent."

"I see that you do me justice, and that you share my views as to

money-lending. Merchants go along in the regular way. Now, I am an innovator, and I don't recognise the law which has set invariable limits to money-lending. I set my price according to the solvency of the borrower, and my way is the right one."

"There can be no doubt about it," replied George, with perfect gravity, "and as we are both of us solvent, I hope that at this time you will not ask more than fifteen per cent."

"Impossible, my dear friend! Twenty is my lowest rate, and I have always put you upon the footing of the most favoured nations, as they say in commercial treaties. But how much do you want, before we say any more? I wish to know, as I have entered into three operations this morning, which have almost cleaned me out, so that if you want much——"

"Forty thousand, not more," interrupted George.

"For yourself? That is double what I can manage."

"For both of us. Twenty thousand each, then."

"No, no," said Savinien, hastily. "I need much less than that."

"Very well then, explain to me what it is that you wish me to do."

"It is the simplest thing in the world," said Fougerey, eagerly. "I will give you a note for forty-four thousand francs at six months, a note to the order of Viscount d'Amaulis, who will endorse it, and in exchange you must hand us forty notes of a thousand francs each."

"In that case your friend is responsible for the whole amount!"

"Of course, as I sign," said Savinien, drily.

"We can come to an understanding on that basis. The question of the date of payment remains to be settled. Six months is too long for me."

"I don't care to have so long a time either," said the viscount, who preferred to shorten the time for which he would be responsible.

"Would three months suit you?"

"I should prefer four," replied George.

"That is rather long; but I propose this: You shall sign a note for forty-three thousand francs, payable June fifteenth."

"What! June fifteenth? Why this is the sixth of May. That would make five weeks."

"Yes; but on June fifteenth we will renew the note for three months. You need not pay till the fifteenth of September."

"What a strange idea! Why not run the payments along from two months to two months?"

"For reasons that regard me alone, my dear sir, and which it is idle to explain. What does it matter to you whether the first payment is for the fifteenth of June or the fifteenth of August? I promise to renew the note, and you know by experience that I always keep my word."

"Oh, I know all that!" rejoined Fougerey, "but I am not the only person interested in the matter, as my friend endorses the note. What do you say, Savinien, to Monsieur Pinchard's proposal?"

"I say that you are free to accept it or let it alone," answered Viscount d'Amaulis, who thought himself bound by his agreement. "You know what we agreed to?"

George caught this ball on the rebound. "Well," said he, "three thousand francs interest for three months is pretty stiff—that makes twenty-two and a half per cent, my worthy Pinchard."

"Don't complain; I have just concluded two loans at twenty-five and one at thirty, and on signatures that are as good as bullion."

"They are not better than ours; but, as we must submit to your twenty-

two and a half, let us end the matter. I don't like affairs that drag. Give me a blank form."

"Here is one, my dear fellow," answered the discount, opening one of the drawers of his desk.

Savinien could not recover from his surprise on seeing George and Pinchard come in this off-handed manner to an understanding about a loan which, in Brittany, owing to formalities connected with mortgages, would have taken three months to conclude, and the confidence shown by Pinchard filled him with amazement.

"I should understand all this if I were rich," said he to himself, while Fougeray was writing on the stamped paper; "but that a usurer should thus accept the mere word of a gentleman as a security is simply astounding."

It renewed his astonishment to hear the money-lender say to him in the most insinuating manner: "Now that our business relations are established, viscount, permit me to assure you if you need my services for yourself, personally, you will always find me disposed to serve you."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir, but there will be no occasion for that," replied Viscount d'Amaulis, coldly.

"Who knows? You go into the most varied kinds of society, and that costs a great deal, as much in the best as in the more entertaining circles, and even though one may have land one may be embarrassed for a time. In that case, viscount, I am available. I flatter myself that many of your social equals do me the honour of coming to see me."

Savinien said nothing. The boastful obsequiousness of the presumptuous fellow displeased him so much that he was anxious to sign and get rid of him.

"It isn't because I wish to see you obliged to borrow again," resumed the engaging Pinchard; "I wish, on the contrary, with all my heart, that you may not again encounter at play such an antagonist as the Swede who served you so badly last night. There is nothing to gain and everything to lose with that individual."

"What!" cried the viscount; "you know——"

"I had the honour of telling you," interrupted Pinchard, "that before you came I saw another of his victims, a Russian gentleman, who lost less than you did, but still a large sum. Besides, I have known Count Aparanda for a long time."

"Bless me! have you, indeed? Well, what do you think of him?" asked Savinien, always on the alert to obtain information concerning his bugbear.

"I think that I wouldn't lend him a solitary copper. He knows that very well; for, when he came to borrow six thousand francs of me on the day after he arrived in Paris, I refused at once."

"He found the money elsewhere, as he has some. What is he, in reality, that fellow?"

"Bah! He is a man who lives expensively and derives his means from unavowed sources. Some fellows of his kind have been rich, and some end by becoming so."

"To say the truth, then, Aparanda is an adventurer," said Fougeray. "I thought so, and he will not be able to take me in again. But I must begin by paying him. Pinchard, my friend, the time has come for counting out your forty notes! Make ready, while Monsieur d'Amaulis endorses the note I have just written out."



Saying this, Fougeray placed the bill stamp before Savinien, and handed him the pen so that the sacrifice might be effected. Pinchard had risen to go to his safe, an imposing, monumental safe—which might have held millions in its bulky body.

There was no chance now of getting off, and Yvonne's cousin signed. It was done in a flash. Pinchard took the note, examined it with a sharp, quick glance, shut it up in his safe, and handed Fougeray the four rolls of bank-notes which he had taken out.

Savinien was now able to see, for the first time in his life, how much easier it is to make engagements than to keep them.

"Correct!" said George, tapping the money-lender on the shoulder, "you are expensive, but you come up to the mark in money matters, and it is agreeable to deal with you—when a man does not mind the cost."

"Oh, three thousand francs' interest need not trouble you. There's the Bourse, and you are one of the lucky ones."

"But not at baccarat. Ah! this is the last time I shall play against the Swede. Good-bye, Pinchard."

"Till we meet again," replied the discounter, with a touch of malice, "Viscount, I am happy to have made your acquaintance, and I have the honour of wishing you good day,"

He re-conducted the two friends to the door of his office, and the last words of Fougeray were: "Remember, it is clearly understood that we renew on the fifteenth of June."

"My word is my bond," majestically replied Pinchard.

At the foot of the stairs George said to his friend: "My dear boy, I will not insult you by telling you how grateful I am, but I cannot omit thanking you for the service you have done me. Without you I should never have done anything with that lynx there."

"What astounds me is that he should accept my signature."

"My dear friend, you don't know your own value. You stand high on the Paris Bourse."

"If I know why, I wish I may be hanged."

"But it is so. You see it yourself; and the other day, at the Bourse, you perceived what was your portion, in the estimation of the brokers, as the nephew of a landowner, and as one yourself. But let us speak of more practical and urgent matters. How much do you want out of what, thanks to you, I have just received? Four thousand? Five thousand? Don't be modest."

"Two thousand will be amply sufficient."

"Here they are," said George, unfastening two notes from a pinned roll.

"I will give them back to you in two or three days."

"Why? Keep them till the fifteenth of September."

"Not at all. I should prefer to have nothing to do with the payment, and I confess that I am not quite easy about it. If this Pinchard should take it into his head to exact his money next month, what would you do?"

"Pinchard is incapable of such a thing," replied Fougeray, "but if—which is impossible!—he should play me such a mean trick as that, I should sell my 'Ottomans,' and pay him, after boxing his ears. Let us go to breakfast."

"Thanks; I shan't breakfast with you this morning. I have some business on hand."

"The deuce you have! I didn't know that you were so busy. I hope that I shall see you at the club this evening."

"I shall be there at five, to pay Monsieur Aparanda. But I don't think of dining there. Madame Montauron receives, and I promised her husband to go to their house."

"You will have a stupid time of it, I can tell you."

"Oh! I'm not going there for amusement's sake, but I must not fail in courtesy; and as I am going away, I shan't be obliged to go there again."

"Is it really decided that you are going to return home?" asked George, in a tone of concern.

"Yes, I have enough of Paris with its Swedes, usurers, and actresses."

"While you are about it, why do you not add: 'And of my friend George as well?'"

"Because I only say what I mean. I have no fault to find with you, and I shall often think of the pleasant hours which we have passed together. Plouër is by no means gay, especially at night-time, when the wind howls through the great halls of the château. But I was born there, and must live there, and I am obliged to confess that the air of this part of the country does not suit my constitution."

"Nonsense! You are perfectly well."

"In body, yes, but my mind is sick."

"Are you in love, by any chance?" asked Fougeray. "Is it Anita or Madame Montauron? She is still very handsome, your banker's wife."

"That may be," said D'Amaulis, "but I should never fall in love with a Parisian woman. The women here are all too dangerous; they put me in mind of a precipice. I should lose my wits, and that is why I long to return to country life. However, I am expected elsewhere at noon and must leave you now."

"Which way are you going?"

"In an opposite direction to yours."

"Good! I understand," laughed George Fougeray, "and I don't want to dog your steps. I shall probably see you at the club at five o'clock; but, in case you persist in your intention of burying yourself alive in the country, you must keep your last evenings here for me."

"I promise you that," replied Savinien; and, shaking hands with his friend, he turned the corner of the Rue Thérèse, and George refrained from following him.

This street, which, so to speak, led nowhere before the great improvements effected in this part of Paris, now conducts direct to the Avenue de l'Opéra. The Provincial Bank was not far off, and as Savinien did not care to reach it before noon, he had not need to make haste. He walked on slowly, thinking of the loan so quickly effected—the loan which had given him two thousand francs which, had he made the effort, he could have done without, and which held him responsible for twenty times as much.

He did not mistrust Fougeray's promises, but could not help thinking of what might happen if, owing to events which he was not able to control, Fougeray should not be able to pay at the proper time. It would be enough to cause an everlasting quarrel between the last of the Amaulis and his uncle Trémorin, who would perhaps forgive his nephew for having spent a great deal of money, but never for having given his signature to a money-lender.

It was, no doubt, rather late in the day to think of danger: but Savinien was thus constituted, and his reason never spoke until after his heart had made itself heard. He had merely thought of getting his

friend George out of a scrape, and it was only now that he began to look fairly at the peril in which he placed himself by thus guaranteeing the payment, in three months, of a sum equivalent to his entire income for seven years. And, as he did not like to dwell upon painful subjects, he said to himself by way of dispelling the annoying thoughts on his mind: "George is a trifle reckless, but he is a worthy fellow. He will pay all right. Why am I worrying myself? I have enough annoying matters to think of without tormenting my head about what won't happen. I will begin by getting rid of Madame Montauron's affairs, and then all will proceed as it should. To-morrow, or the day after, I will draw out enough of my letter of credit to reimburse the hundred louis, which I only took as a measure of prudence, and I shan't have to think of Master Pinchard. In September I shall have my note returned, duly paid by George. I shall receive it at Plouër, where I shall establish myself once more: it will be a remembrance of stormy days, and may not be without a certain charm. When a man has reached port, he likes to remember the perils of a stormy voyage."

People always believe what they wish, and Savinien d'Amaulis by the time he had reached the Provincial Bank, was already quite easy in mind as to the results of his rashness. The building seemed to him less imposing than when he had first beheld it. His eyes had had time to become used to the dimensions of vast establishments, such as are seen in Paris, and the bustle of this market-like banking house no longer intimidated him.

He was not now embarrassed amid the crowd which filled the hall on the ground-floor, for he knew the bearings of the place, and was not sorry that there was so compact a throng, as he hoped that in the bustle he should pass unperceived.

He glided along between the groups of people, and being well acquainted with the bearings of the place, he speedily found the stairs which led to the desk of the clerk who had charge of depositors' cards. This clerk was alone when Viscount d'Amaulis entered the office, and he received him with the indifference usual to persons who do the same mechanical work scores of times every day. He asked for the ticket, and compared the number with that upon his books. But as he did so, he saw the name of the depositor who now asked to be admitted to the vaults, and his manner changed at once. He bowed politely to M. d'Amaulis, and begged him to be seated. Savinien made a gesture of refusal. He would have been glad to dispense with all these ceremonies which delayed him, when he was so anxious to finish with the business as soon as possible. The clerk rose, and applying his lips to an india-rubber tube, spoke to some one in another part of the house. Savinien recognised this manœuvre as one to which M. Bouret had resorted, but under present circumstances, it made him very anxious.

"What does this scribbler mean by what he is about?" he thought; "has he been told to let any one know when I appear?"

"All right, sir," said the clerk, after listening to a reply made through the tube, "you can go to the vaults. The way is free."

This reply reassured Savinien, who at once hurried off to profit by a moment when there was no one in the vaults. Still, before leaving the office, he could see that the clerk applied his mouth to another tube, and began talking to some one else, also in the distance.

"He cannot be speaking to the overseer of the vaults, as the latter has

just answered him," said the viscount to himself, as he went towards the staircase. "I saw that he did not use the same apparatus. There are decidedly too many telephones in this establishment, and I have no fancy for such a number of speaking-trumpets everywhere."

He even asked himself whether it would be wise to proceed, but he reflected that it would be the same thing over again on his second appearance, as no one could enter the vaults unless authorised by the clerk. Besides, Madame Montauron could not wait as she needed her diamonds that day, and he could not delay matters till the morrow. Besides, how was it possible that the subordinate should think himself called upon to let his employers know of the arrival of M. d'Amaulis, who, to him, was merely a depositor like any other—a figure, a number?

It was infinitely more simple and natural to suppose that the clerk was going through these manœuvres with the telephone to speak about some other business matters; in an establishment like the Provincial Bank, there must be frequent communication between one office and another.

Besides, the overseer of the deposits was walking about in front of the gate, which he opened when the card, previously examined by the clerk, was shown to him. At this, the suspicions of the viscount came to an end, and he admitted that he had taken needless alarm.

The vaults were built in such a manner that a glance sufficed to show that no one was there. It would have been impossible to hide one's-self in this gas-lit hall, which had but four walls, all white with light, and destitute of any apparent recess. Not the smallest nook in which a man could hide was visible, nor was there a corner unilluminated by the dazzling light.

Savinien, on his first visit had, at thirty paces, recognised Count Aparanda by his attire alone. He, therefore, now entered without fear of meeting any one, and went straight to that part of the wall where he knew that his compartment was located. He had his key with him, and in order to use it, he had only to set the letters forming the password in place, which could be done in four touches.

The compartment once opened, he had merely to take the casket out and carry it away with him. Viscount d'Amaulis supposed that there might be some formalities on relinquishing a compartment for good, but he thought that these could be gone through with later on, when Madame Montauron had received her casket.

Besides, according to the explanations given by M. Bouret, a subscriber had the right to use the compartment rented by him as he pleased during the term for which it was let, and could take things out and put them back as he pleased, fill the cavity entirely or empty it, without ceasing to be possessed of his rights until the end of the year for which he was set down as a depositor of the Provincial Bank.

Savinien at first thought of leaving the key in the keyhole on going off, but he remembered the rules which the under-manager had explained to him, and concluded that it would be better to close the compartment again after taking out the casket, re-arrange the combination letters, and remove the key precisely as though he intended to return. The main point was to operate quickly in order to avoid being seen, and to get away as soon as possible.

Viscount d'Amaulis found himself in precisely the same position as some robber about to burst a safe open. "This is the result of bad

associations," said he to himself as he read over the numbers inscribed upon the brass plates. "I am reduced to hiding and escaping."

But this was no time for such tardy scruples. He soon came before the compartment numbered 919, and began to form the word, without which he could not open it. The word was Yvon, and Savinien, bending over the brass plate, and absorbed in what he was doing, had just placed the first letter under the indicating arrow, when a hand was softly laid on his shoulder.

It is needless to say that he straightened himself up very quickly, and on turning round, found himself face to face with M. Montauron. His stupefaction was such that he remained with open mouth and haggard gaze, like a robber caught in the very act of burglary.

"Excuse me, viscount," said the banker, smiling. "I ought to have announced my coming from afar, as I see that I frightened you by touching you."

"No, no!" stammered Savinien, "but you startled me, and——"

"Yes, I know! you are nervous. One can't control a start of surprise. But I must tell you why I came here, for I don't wish you to suppose that I amuse myself with terrifying the ticket-holders of the Provincial Bank vaults, or with spying upon them. Our meeting is the result of accident. I also, let me tell you, have hired a compartment in the vaults to keep my family documents, which are safer here than at my house, and which I don't disturb perhaps once in the course of a year. To-day, however, I have occasion to look at my marriage contract, and I came here to take it out. You know that with our system each depositor is obliged to open his compartment for himself, as he alone has the secret of the word."

These remarks only half reassured Savinien. The words, "My marriage contract," had an ominous sound.

"As I opened the gate," added M. Montauron, "I was quite surprised to see you; that is, both surprised and delighted, as I always think it a pleasure to meet you. I hope that you will do me the favour to come to my private room by-and-bye, but business first. You have come to take out the deposit you made, and I don't wish to disturb you. You were just about to open your compartment. Go on, viscount. Meanwhile I will open mine, which is near your own."

The viscount did not stir. He was leaning against the brass plate and trying to invent a means of escaping from his atrocious situation. To open the compartment in presence of the jealous husband would be equivalent to ruining the wife, for M. Montauron would no doubt recognise the casket. What pretext could D'Amaulis bring forward for not opening the compartment?

He had not yet recovered his composure, and he made the first excuse that offered itself to his mind.

"A most absurd thing has happened to me," he said, with an effort. "Would you believe it, sir, I have forgotten my word?"

"Indeed!" exclaimed M. Montauron, "I saw very badly, then. I thought that you had begun making it out. You had your hand on the first brass knob, I thought. I must be mistaken."

"No, I was feeling round in the hope of finding the letters by turning this knob, which was absurd, I admit, and I was going to give it up when you appeared."

"It would be better to try to remember the word."

"I have tried and am trying now, but it does not come back to me," interrupted Savinien.

"I will endeavour to help you. Let me see! You cannot have chosen four chance letters. People usually choose a word easy to remember, or the name of a friend. I chose the beginning of my wife's name, which is Aurélie; I took Auré, just as you might have taken Trém, from thinking of Monsieur de Trémorin's name, or else——"

"No, no!" said Savinien, quickly, "it is neither a name nor a surname."

"Let us think of something else, then."

"We shall never find it; when I forget, I forget entirely."

"The mischief! that's very annoying," said the banker. "It would be necessary to break the plate or burst the lock, and that could not be done without the permission of the Board, which would have to hold a meeting to decide the matter."

"Oh, I can wait. I don't despair of remembering the word again just when I am not thinking about it. I know how I am. I am subject to sudden forgetfulness, and then everything comes back all at once."

"When you recall the word again, you had better make a note of it," said M. Montauron, gravely. "The plight in which you find yourself has not been provided for by our regulations, and whenever you wish to remove your deposit, we should be as much embarrassed as yourself. However, I am delighted to hear that you have no need to touch your money at present."

"No, not at all," muttered Savinien, feeling sensible that the banker was mocking him, and not knowing what to say.

"It is needless to remark," added M. Montauron, "that if you need an advance while waiting for your memory to return——"

"Thanks," interrupted Savinien, "if I do, I have my letter of credit."

"Even if that were overdrawn, I should be none the less ready to serve you," said the banker. "Now I will ask your leave to open my compartment before going up stairs with you. It won't take me long, as I have not forgotten my word."

"Do so, sir, and excuse me if I don't go to your office with you. Some one is waiting for me."

Savinien, in stepping aside, as he said this, uncovered the brass plate before which he had been standing, and M. Montauron, instead of replying, leaned forward in the most natural way in the world to examine the alphabetical knobs."

"Look!" said he, "the first letter under the arrow is Y."

"I did not press on that," replied Viscount d'Amaulis.

"No, I suppose not," said M. Montauron, quietly, "it is chance that brought this Y to the top; but I make the remark to you to put you upon the right track."

"How, sir?" stammered Savinien, who felt more and more embarrassed every moment.

"Heaven knows how you will laugh at my simplicity, but I thought of a short name very common in Brittany, and which begins with that seldom used letter Y. Doesn't Mademoiselle de Trémorin bear the name of Yvonne?"

"Yes, sir, but I don't see——"

"The idea came to me," interrupted the banker, "that you might have chosen her name. It would be so natural!"

"But the name is much too long—there are six letters in it," said Savinien.

"Oh, you might have chosen the first four letters," urged M. Montauron.

"No ! no ! if I had I should remember them."

"That is true. Excuse me, viscount, for having detained you with idle conjectures. I should have done much better to let you go off, as you are expected. You are quite free, and you will excuse me if I don't see you out. I am awaited, too, and before going back to my private room I must do what I came to our vaults for—get out my marriage contract."

"Certainly," said Viscount d'Amaulis, hastily, "and I am going. I have the honour, sir, to wish you good-day."

"Don't forget, my dear sir," called the banker, "that Madame Montauron relies upon seeing you this evening."

Savinien did not pause, and even dispensed with replying to this reminder of the invitation which M. Montauron had certainly not articulated unmeaningly.

The young fellow only thought of getting away from the equivocal and ironical remarks of this husband, who undoubtedly suspected the truth, and already revenged himself in anticipation by making his wife's assumed accomplice ridiculous.

"I was not mistaken," said D'Amaulis to himself, as he went up the stairs four at a time: "the clerk who took my card had orders to let Monsieur Montauron know as soon as I presented myself. Montauron arrived here at an hour at which he is not in the habit of coming; he came expressly to wait for my appearance, that's clear. How did he know that I was coming here this morning? From that tattler, Monsieur Bouret, perhaps? Bouret, when he was joking last night about my losses, told me that I should no doubt need to open my casket to pay Count Aparanda. He may have said the same to Monsieur Montauron, and besides, if Monsieur Montauron thinks that his wife's diamonds are in my hands, he must also have thought that she would wish to have them out this morning, since he informed her that he should expect her to wear them this evening. This alone is enough to have led him to spy upon me. And, besides, why try and find an explanation? The unfortunate woman is lost in any case. Montauron has no proof that her casket is in the vault, and he arrived before I had opened my compartment; but he did not believe a word of what I said to him; and he will take such measures that I shall never be able to remove the deposit without his knowledge. Heaven knows how all this will end !"

These despairing thoughts occupied Savinien till a fresh incident interrupted him. While crossing the main hall of the establishment he came across M. Bouret, who was approaching in an opposite direction, and who, on seeing him, ran forward with open arms and a smile on his face.

"Ah, viscount !" began he, slipping his arm under Savinien's, "I am delighted to meet you. You must tell me how Anita's supper-party finished."

"Very badly," replied Savinien, who was enraged at being stopped by this importunate being at the very moment when he most wished to go off.

"You lost, then ?"

"Everybody lost."

"I thought it would be so, but I don't care about the others. May I ask you how much the Swede won from you ?"

"A very great deal of money."

"The mischief! I prophesied to you that you would leave your feathers in that vulture's claws, and I reproach myself with not having insisted upon taking you away with me. I saw that bad luck was about to come, and I had made up my mind as to the so-called Count Aparanda. Fortunately, you had your windfall on 'Change, so this loss won't trouble you."

"I have only just enough to pay my debts."

"Oh, you don't tell me so! The blow was harder than I thought, then. I need not tell you that if you need any money I am at your disposal; but let me give you a piece of advice."

"What is it?" replied Savinien, impatiently.

"I advise you not to pay this gentleman before I clear up certain matters which appear to me very singular indeed."

"How is that? Do you think that he cheats at cards?" asked the viscount.

"I am convinced of it."

"It would be necessary to prove it, and that isn't possible. Besides, it would not suit me to enter into any such matter as that. I have lost. So much the worse for me. It remains for me to pay. Fougeray and the other gentlemen will do the same."

"However, if they were positively certain that this gentleman were nothing but an adventurer, leading a doubtful life in this city, they would, perhaps, reflect, and look twice at the thing before paying."

"What have you learned regarding him?" asked Savinien.

"Little, but enough to make me greatly suspect him. You remember, of course, that when I spoke to him last night about his change of residence he told me that he now lived at the Grand Hôtel."

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I had the curiosity to look into the thing. I have just come from the Grand Hôtel."

"Nobody knows him there, I suppose?"

"No, he engaged a room there, but he does not occupy it."

"That is certainly strange," muttered Savinien.

"So strange that I beg of you to mention the fact to your club committee."

"I am not qualified to do such a thing; but it seems to me that you, as manager of the Provincial Bank, can do so."

"What? summon him to tell me his real residence, or withdraw his deposit? That could not be done. This man rents a compartment in our vaults for one year; he has the same right to it as you or any other depositor. He is at home there as he has paid his subscription. I have no right to trouble myself about anything further."

"But if he should not re-appear, what then?"

"We should have no right to touch what he has deposited with us."

"Not even at the end of a year, when his term of subscription will be up?"

"That would be a question to be settled by the Board. The case has not yet presented itself, nor do I think that any such particular instance will occur. This gentleman does not certainly intend to leave such valuables as his chest may contain with us. I even feel sure that he will remove his chest some day, and soon, too. Just now he is making a pile of money here in Paris, and he must be thinking of carrying his business



to other capital cities. Even if we were sure that he has deposited with us the results of a theft, we should be authorised in refusing to give the chest up. He might even—this is between ourselves—have it taken away by some one else, in case he had reasons for not showing himself.”

“I beg your pardon ; I thought that you once told me the reverse of that,” said the Viscount d’Amaulis.

“When you came to deposit, you asked me what would happen if you lost your ticket, and if it were found by a robber. I told you that the robber could not use it to get hold of your pretty steel casket, even if he also found the key of your compartment, and that for a reason which explains itself—he would not know the word with which the door opens. But suppose that a depositor confides his card to a friend, as well as the key and the word, there would then be nothing to prevent the friend from taking out the deposited object and carrying it away with him. He would go down to the vaults alone, and do as he pleased there, without being prevented by any one.”

“Even if the depositor were personally known by your clerk ?” asked Savinien, whom these details interested much more than the under-manager supposed.

“In that case, the clerk who looks over the card might ask for some explanation, but it would be sufficient to show him an authorisation from the depositor. In point of fact this never happens. The bearer of the ticket is allowed to pass in. Our responsibility is covered by the mere fact that no one can guess the combination of letters by which the compartments are secured. But I am lecturing to you on business, and I don’t even ask you if I can do anything for you here. You came, perhaps, for part of the sum mentioned in your letter of credit ?”

“No, no !” replied Savinien, promptly ; “I came for information, and some one is waiting for me on the boulevard.”

“Then I will not detain you. Good-bye till I see you again, viscount, but take my advice and don’t be in a hurry about paying Count Aparanda.”

Savinien, freed from the under-manager’s detaining arm, now hastened towards the exit. He was anxious to be alone to look into the chances that now remained of freeing Madame Montauron from the frightful situation in which the occurrence at the vaults had placed her, and he went away repeating to himself, in a low tone, certain words which M. Bouret had just said to him : “When a person has any reasons for not showing himself, he can have the object which he has deposited at the Provincial Bank taken away by a friend.”

END OF PART I.

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